BILLY WHISKERS

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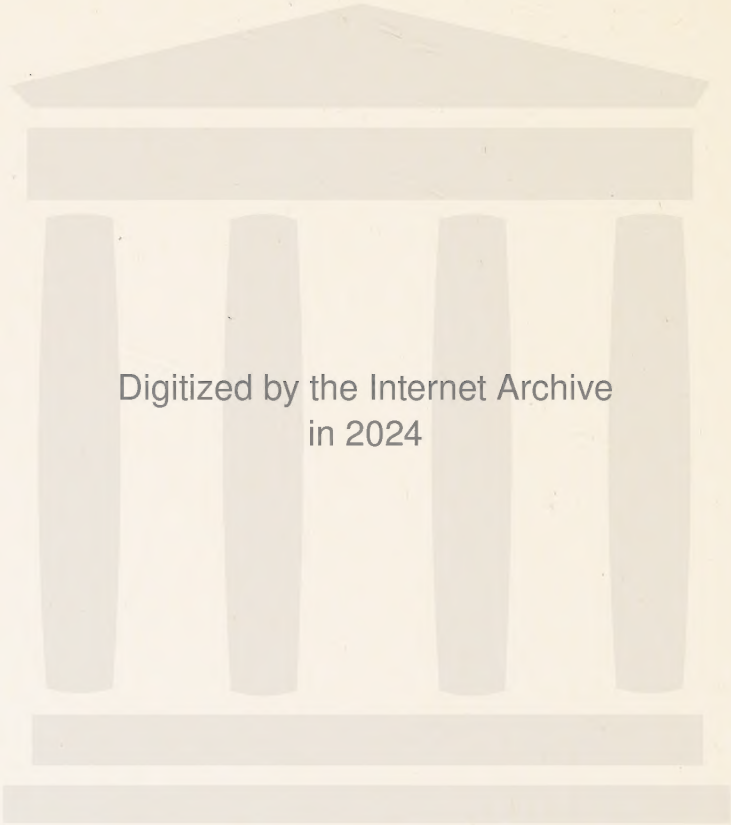
STOWAWAY

Continuing the
FAMOUS
BILLY WHISKERS
SERIES

POPULAR EDITION



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BILLY WHISKERS STOWAWAY

Continuing the
FAMOUS BILLY WHISKERS SERIES

Illustrated by
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BILLY WHISKERS STOWAWAY

CHAPTER I

THE DEPARTURE

ONE beautiful June morning Billy Whiskers stood beside the entrance of the tourist camp on Mr. Watson's farm in Wisconsin and watched the last of the overnight guests go down the road. Back in the deserted camp Button and Stubby were sniffing around beneath the empty tables and Nannie was industriously prying the lid off a big garbage can. As the cover fell to the ground with a clatter Billy Whiskers turned toward his energetic spouse and watched her lift out a huge piece of coffee cake.

"Come on over here, Billy dear!" Nannie called, placing the luscious piece of cake upon the ground for her beloved husband. "Those people in the pretty green car didn't eat anything and the garbage can is just full of good things. This coffee cake has thick sugar icing and is full of raisins, just the way you like it best."

At Nannie's words, Stubby and Button came racing from a near-by table, but Billy Whiskers stood perfectly still as if he had not heard.

This amazed the others, for Billy Whiskers was noted far and wide for his voracious appetite.

"Dearie me!" Nannie mourned, handing out one juicy Frankfurter to Stubby and another to Button, "I am really afraid that dear old Billy is growing uneasy again. He has lost his appetite, and that is always one of the signs. It is just about a year since he left on that trip out west, and he has been settled and contented until the past two weeks. Dear, dear! I do hope that he doesn't go away on another of his wild jaunts. He is really too old for such hardships and excitement."

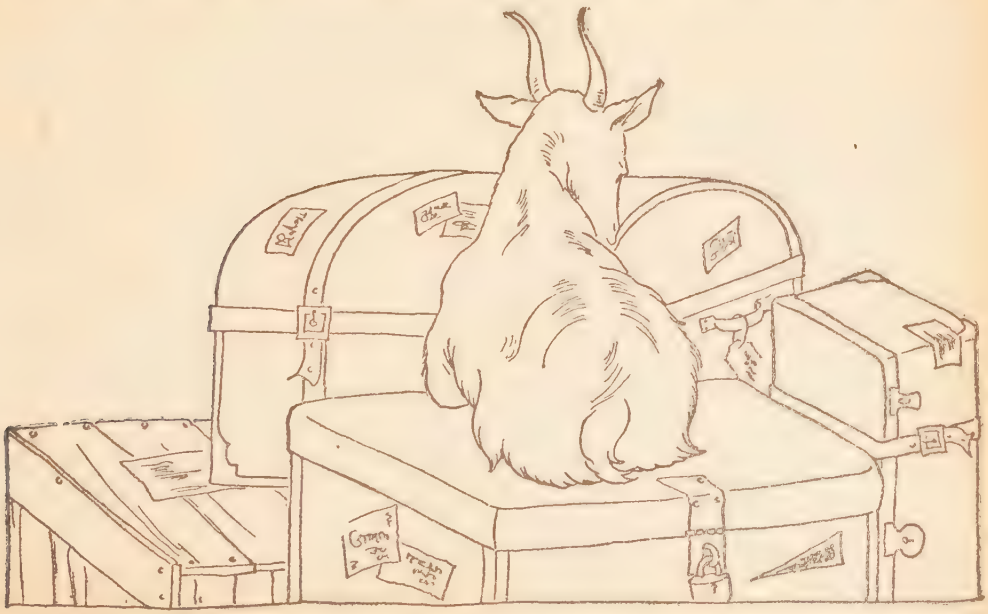
"Old!" ejaculated Billy Whiskers, who had approached quietly while the others were eating. "Nannie, my dear, why *do* you persist in saying that I am old? I am only a year older than I was last year at this time and I'm sure I don't feel a day older. Old indeed!" he sniffed.

"There, there, Billy dear," Nannie crooned, handing him a big piece of doughnut. "Here's a most delicious doughnut just white with sugar. You see, my dear, I quite forget that you are such a marvelous example of everlasting youth. Now, frankly, I *feel* old, and I am a year younger than you. After all, it isn't the years that matter. It's all in the way one *feels*, and I do wish I could feel half as young and sprightly as you, Billy."

Wise Nannie! She always knew just what to say when Billy was

offended, and as usual he was instantly mollified and began nibbling at the tidbits with enthusiasm. When there was nothing left and the others were napping in the shade of one of the tall trees, he wandered back to the road and watched the cars speed by.

To tell the truth, Billy had been thinking all the morning of the happy family with whom he journeyed through the west the previous summer. He had been dreaming of those delightful days on the trailer, of his many adventures, of the MacGregor children, Margie, Joan and Gene, and the never-ending stream of good things that came out of Gene's pockets and, as a result, his thoughts



had turned toward their home in New Hampshire, somewhere far away in the east.

Just as he was thinking longingly of all these things, a big picnic wagon came slowly down the road. It was full of happy children who were shouting and singing and munching cookies or candy or fruit.

"There's Billy Whiskers!" shouted one of the children as he recognized the famous goat. "Let's throw him something to eat!"

The next instant there was a veritable shower of cookies and doughnuts and cake, which Billy Whiskers gobbled up with amazing alacrity. Whereupon the children shouted with glee and threw him other edibles. Thus it happened that as the big wagon passed slowly down the road, bound for a distant picnic grove, Billy wandered on behind, watching for the tempting morsels.

The picnic wagon was halted at a crossing beside a small station while a long heavy eastbound freight train pulled slowly by. Billy Whiskers, as interested as the children, jumped upon a baggage truck standing on the platform and watched the cars clatter slowly past. There was always something very tantalizing about a train to Billy. He never saw one passing that he didn't wonder where it was going and wish that he were on it.

While he was staring, a long flat car bearing some big pieces of farm machinery drew slowly into his line of vision, and he saw the

words "New Hampshire" marked in white chalk upon the side of the car.

"That's where the MacGregors live!" flashed through his mind, and as quickly came the thought, "This car will take me just where I wish to go!" The next instant Billy Whiskers leaped for the car.

Fortunately for him, the train was barely moving and the baggage truck was near the track, or something very terrible might have happened to the impetuous old goat. But once more his own good luck was with him. He landed safely on the flat car in the shadow of a great reaper just as the train gathered speed and went clattering down the grade beyond.

With his head stuck out over the low railing and his long whiskers streaming in the wind, Billy watched the children who had seen his wild leap. Even above the rumble of the train he could hear their shouts. A moment later, however, the train passed around a bend and the picnic wagon was lost to sight, as was also the long stretch of dusty road which led back to Mr. Watson's farm and Nannie.

For a moment Billy Whiskers was conscience-stricken, as he always was when he left home on one of his jaunts, for he knew very well that faithful Nannie would worry and lose her appetite until she heard from him.

"But I didn't really plan to stow away like this," he assured him-

self soberly. "It just happened. If I had planned it, I would never have chosen a flat car. I have traveled this way before and it is most unsatisfactory, for there is no way to get anything to eat or drink unless the train stops for a long time on a siding. I hope New Hampshire isn't far away or I shall starve to death before I arrive."

"Well, I never! Where did *you* come from, old fellow?" cried someone behind him.

Startled, Billy Whiskers turned around and found himself gazing into the astonished eyes of a lad who lay hiding between two big pieces of machinery.

CHAPTER II

TWO STOWAWAYS

TINY TIM was the nickname of the frail, hungry-looking little fellow who crawled out of his hiding-place and stroked Billy's neck with eager, loving fingers.

"You look just like the clever old goat that I have been reading about for years!" he declared. "Yes, sir! you look *exactly* like Billy Whiskers himself, and that is what I shall call you. Can it really be Billy Whiskers—*the* Billy Whiskers? But of course not! Billy Whiskers is only a story-book goat. He's not real."

"The very idea!" thought Billy indignantly. "Not real? Young man, I'm the realest goat you ever saw in your life! Story-book goat, indeed!"

"But I'm glad you are here anyway," the lad went on, overjoyed to have a companion. "I hope you can go all the way back to New Hampshire with me. Uncle Dan would let me keep you, I am sure, and you would have a wonderful time and such a fine home. Oh, dear! I wish that I had never run away. Sometimes I think that I shall never get back to dear Uncle Dan's again."

With this, Tiny Tim put his head against Billy Whiskers' woolly

neck and cried in such a discouraged way that the big goat felt exceedingly sorry for him. He turned his head to gaze at the lad, and at that moment Tiny Tim looked up and caught the goat's wondering stare.

"You want to know what it's all about, don't you, old fellow?" he stammered, choking back his sobs as he patted Billy Whiskers' side. "Well, you see, my folks died when I was a baby and ever since I have lived with Uncle Dan and Aunt Hetty on a big farm in New Hampshire. My name is John Chandler, but Uncle Dan started calling me Tiny Tim years ago because I was so small. He said I always made him think of Tiny Tim in the Christmas story.

"Well, of course Aunt Hetty called me Tiny Tim too, and then when I began to go to school I was so little compared with the other boys of my age that they also called me Tiny Tim. I just hated it! I drank quarts of milk and all the cream I could get, and ate more food than any two boys. But somehow I never grew big and strong like the others, and I was discouraged.

"Then one day this spring I foolishly ran away with some show people. They treated me well until after we were across the Mississippi River. Then I guess they thought I was so far from home that they could do exactly as they pleased. At last they became so cruel that I hid and they had to go on without me.

"Now I am going back to Puddle Corners if I can get there.

They may all call me Tiny Tim for the rest of my life if they want to, and I shan't mind it at all. Gracious! won't it be wonderful to hear Aunt Hetty say, 'Well, well, here's our Tiny Tim again, bless his heart!'

"And then she'll set a place at the kitchen table and bring out everything in the pantry—doughnuts and jelly and pickles and pie and cake and everything! Won't it taste good though! Why, Billy Whiskers, I haven't had a real honest-to-goodness meal since I left Puddle Corners!"

"Puddle Corners!" thought Billy Whiskers, greatly interested. "What a strange name! I wonder if it was named for a Mr. Puddle, or if there are puddles there, or what! Puddle Corners! In New Hampshire, too! What a strange coincidence! I never heard Gene mention it, but it may be somewhere near the MacGregors. Anyway, it sounds as if there would be lots of good things to eat at Uncle Dan's, so I shall certainly go on with Tiny Tim."

For the rest of the day the two stowaways rode happily along on the rumbling train. Once in a while Billy Whiskers stuck his head out over the edge of the flat car and gazed around the country, but when they approached a town or slowed down on a siding, Tiny Tim always drew him down into his place of concealment beneath the machinery where they would not be noticed by passing railroad men.

"We mustn't get put off this New Hampshire car, Billy," Tiny Tim declared earnestly. "There aren't so many cars going to New Hampshire. I know, for I looked and looked before I found this one. If they should put me off, I don't know how I should ever get home again, it's such a long, long way."

That night Billy Whiskers slept fitfully, with Tiny Tim snuggled close to his side. The sun was rising when he woke, ravenously hungry, and gazed at the frail little fellow.

"Poor little chap! He looks just about starved!" he thought. "His face is so pinched and white and he is so very thin. I wonder when he ate last. He hasn't had a mouthful since I arrived yesterday noon. Dear, dear! Something must be done about it at once. If we would only pull into the railroad yards of a big city, I could jump off and find something, I am sure."

About half an hour later the train began to slow down as it rumbled through the outskirts of a city. Billy Whiskers watched with delight as they passed between rows of tall buildings, and the odors of many breakfasts came floating to him upon the morning breeze.

Before long the train drew into a freight yard and came slowly to a halt among other long lines of cars. Engines were puffing and cars bumping together, and just as Billy Whiskers ventured to lift his head to look about him, a brakeman went running by.

"We'll be here half an hour!" he shouted to someone in the dis-

tance. "I'm going to get a cup of coffee and a ham-and-egg sandwich."

Half an hour! Billy Whiskers pricked up his ears at that. In that length of time perhaps he could find something for Tiny Tim to eat. He glanced quickly toward the sleeping lad and to his relief found that the halting of the train had not awakened him.

"I'll have a good breakfast for him when he wakes up," Billy decided with his usual optimism and, very careful not to disturb Tiny Tim, he leaped to the ground and trotted off among the long lines of cars.

He could smell breakfast cooking somewhere. Luck led him past a dining-car that was waiting to be attached to an outgoing train. The colored cooks and waiters were laughing and talking on the platform beside the car. Billy could see their legs on the other side of the train as he trotted along beside the huge wheels. He stepped away so he could look into the car.

"They are waiting for the car to be picked up," he decided thoughtfully. "Not a soul can I see in the car. There must be all kinds of food there. Good food, too, or my name's not Billy Whiskers. I'll just go in and investigate. If the cook is in the kitchen, he will only chase me out. On the other hand, if no one is there, I may find a regular banquet."

He leaped up the steps at the rear and quickly made his way into

the empty diner. His wise old nose led him directly into the little kitchen. The sight that greeted his eyes was almost too good to be true. The day's deliveries had just been made from the commissary department and all sorts of supplies were stacked around in baskets and boxes and bags waiting for the cooks to put them away as soon as the train started.

"I'll eat all I can first," Billy decided. "Then if they chase me out, I at least shall have had something. Anything that I can take with me will be for Tiny Tim. I can't possibly carry away enough for both of us, so I might as well have a good feast while I'm about it."

And have a good feast he certainly did. Fortunately for him, the colored cooks and waiters remained on the platform and for some minutes he had the small kitchen all to himself. He thrust his eager nose into packages and bags and boxes. Rolls and bananas and pastries disappeared as if by magic.

Never in his life had Billy Whiskers eaten so much so quickly, but he knew his time was limited. At the end of ten minutes the kitchen looked as though a cyclone had struck it. Billy was swallowing a piece of French pastry when bang! the car jolted with such force that the startled goat was plunged headfirst into a tall can of cream, which tipped over and only made bad matters worse.

"Goodness! The diner is coupled to a train. I must get off!" he

thought, panic-stricken, as he heard voices in the narrow passageway. "Let me find something for Tiny Tim in a hurry." He seized the one box still securely tied and fled through the long dining-car.

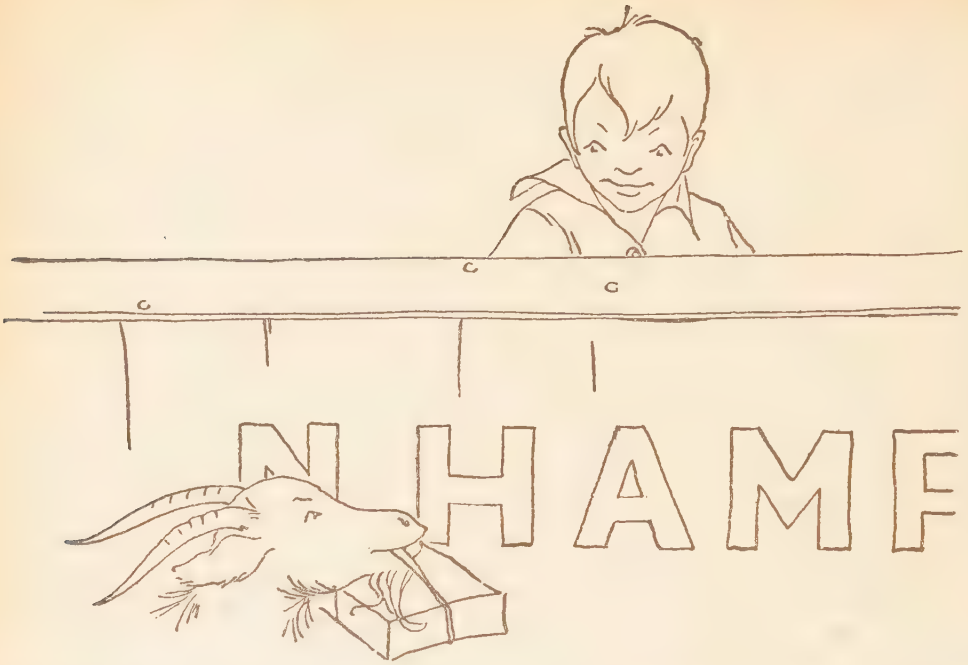
Past the astonished waiters sped the big white goat, lurching this way and that as the train moved slowly forward, and evading the hands outstretched to catch him. In a moment more he had gained the door, and leaped to the platform.

Luckily for Billy, the diner was only being switched and was not moving fast, so he landed safely with the box still held firmly between his teeth. In another moment he was racing back toward the freight train with the shouts and angry threats of the diner's crew ringing in his ears as they crowded upon the rear platform.

In the distance Billy could see the high water tank he had chosen for a landmark when he left the flat car and hurried toward it. A few moments later he raced up to the car and found Tiny Tim peering anxiously over the side.

"Oh, Billy Whiskers, I'm so glad you've come back again!" he cried. "I was afraid you had gone away for good. Get up here quick before the brakeman comes by again."

But to Billy's chagrin and Tiny Tim's dismay, that was the one thing Billy Whiskers could not do. The flat car was much too high above the ground. He could not jump so far. So he stood there for a moment, completely nonplussed, and wondered how



on earth he could ever get up again. It was a serious problem.

"It's too high for you to jump, isn't it, old fellow?" cried Tiny Tim, understanding Billy Whiskers' predicament. "Well, well, we must do something at once. There's a barrel over there. It seems to be empty. If I jump down and roll it over here and stand it on end, do you think you could jump to the top of the barrel and from there to the car?"

To Tiny Tim's delight, Billy Whiskers nodded solemnly; whereupon the boy climbed down and rolled the empty barrel over beside

the car. There was no one in sight, and it was all done in a minute. Billy Whiskers leaped upon the barrel and from there to the flat car. When Tiny Tim had climbed back into his hiding-place, Billy laid the big box down beside him.

"What in the world is this, Billy?" he cried in astonishment, and read, *One box of lunch ordered for Mr. Graham and family.* "Why, Billy Whiskers, where did you get it?" He quickly unwrapped the box and removed the cover. Inside was the most delicious lunch imaginable. It had been prepared expressly for one of the officials of the railroad company who wished to surprise his children with a jolly picnic lunch in their drawing-room on the train.

"Oh!" gasped Tiny Tim, amazed at his good luck. "Why, Billy Whiskers, I never saw anything so wonderful! Sandwiches and eggs and chicken and fruit and cheese and pickles and olives!" He bit into one of the sandwiches hungrily, then stopped in dismay.

"The box isn't mine!" he declared disappointedly. "I almost forgot. It belongs to Mr. Graham, whoever *he* is. Billy Whiskers, you rascal, where did you find it? We must take it back this minute!"

To Billy Whiskers' delight, the train gave a rattle and jerk and began to move slowly out of the yard, bearing with it a happy, if somewhat puzzled lad, and a goat who was extremely well pleased with himself and his morning's adventure.

CHAPTER III

A LUCKY RESCUE

FOR the next twenty-four hours, Billy Whiskers enjoyed his ride immensely. The weather was perfect, the lunch in the big box was exceedingly good, and Tiny Tim was a splendid traveling companion.

On the third morning Billy woke early and found himself extremely thirsty. They had used up Tiny Tim's meager supply of water on the previous afternoon, and there seemed to be no prospect of replenishing it.

"I'm no camel," Billy fretted, thinking of all the cool running streams he had ever seen and growing more thirsty every minute. "Neither is Tiny Tim. Besides, he would have had water enough to last for days if I hadn't drunk a great deal more than my share—though really I didn't take more than a sip at a time."

The most tantalizing part of the whole thing was that at that very moment the train was passing over a long bridge and Billy could see a long stretch of the river as it wound down through the valley through which they were passing.

"'Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink'," he thought

dismally. "My, what wouldn't I give for a good long drink of cool water!"

As he gazed at the river, he thoughtlessly stuck his head farther and farther out of his hiding-place. So it was that Pat Reilly, the new brakeman, glimpsed him as he climbed down the iron ladder on the box-car next to the flat which bore the reaper and the stowaways.

He was so astonished to see Billy's head sticking out of the reaper that he hesitated before jumping across. The freight gave a jerk. Pat lost his footing but managed to obtain a hold on the flat car and hung on desperately as the train jerked and bumped along.

Billy Whiskers was as astonished to see the brakeman as the brakeman was to see him. He realized instantly that he had disobeyed Tiny Tim when he allowed himself to be seen, but before he could decide what to do about it, he saw the fellow fall. A moment later he had leaped from his hiding-place and was bounding toward the trainman.

"He will fall between the cars if I don't do something," Billy decided quickly, and did the very first thing that came into his head. He seized the brakeman's coat firmly with his teeth and pulled backward with all his might and main. Tiny Tim came running too, and between them they hauled the man back to safety on the flat car.

Now Pat Reilly was a jolly blue-eyed Irishman, with plenty of freckles and a smile that made him many friends. So when he looked

up and found himself gazing into the bewhiskered face of a big white goat, he grinned in spite of the pain in his wrist and head.

"Faith, and am I seeing things?" he demanded faintly, noticing Tiny Tim for the first time. "Is that a goat, or am I dreaming?"

"It's a goat," Tiny Tim assured Pat earnestly. "It's Billy Whiskers —or at least I think it is."

"Billy Whiskers!" cried the young fellow and sat up quickly, rubbing a sprained wrist and a sore head as he looked at the goat. "You don't mean *the* Billy Whiskers that the books are written about, do you?"

"I think so," Tiny Tim declared. "I'm not sure, but he looks and acts just like him. He's awfully smart."

"Well, isn't that luck!" Pat exclaimed in huge delight. "I have been reading about him ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, and here he is! Yes, sir! It does look like him, sure enough! Was it he that grabbed my coat and pulled me back just as I was slipping?"

"Yes, sir!" Tiny Tim agreed, "I didn't get out of the reaper until he had pulled you up over the edge of the car."

"That was a close shave," shuddered the young fellow. "I couldn't get my feet up and I was slipping fast when I felt something pulling me back. If it hadn't been for that goat I would have been killed, sure."

From that moment the way of the two stowaways was made more

easy, thanks to Pat Reilly. When he had heard Tiny Tim's story, he promised to keep their hiding-place a secret and asked them what he could do to make them more comfortable.

"Here is a dollar," Tiny Tim said, holding out one of his two silver dollars. "If you could bring me a sandwich once in a while and some carrots or something for Billy Whiskers—oh, yes, and fresh water, we could get along fine, couldn't we, Billy?"

Billy nodded solemnly, greatly to the delight of his two friends, and began to sniff Pat's pockets as much as to say, "And if you have anything to eat, I'll take it right now. I'm hungry."

Pat hurried away with Tiny Tim's pail and soon came running back with it full of water, and he watched as they drank their fill. As soon as the freight made a stop, he brought more water, and it is to be suspected that Tiny Tim's dollar didn't begin to buy all the good things he brought for them to eat.

"This is really too good to last," Billy thought as he lay munching a big apple, and little knew what a good prophet he would prove to be.

CHAPTER IV

FORCED FROM THE TRAIN

THAT very night as the train was pulling out of a big city, two men climbed hurriedly up on the flat car and began to look for a place to hide.

"Here's a good one, Bill," one of them called, and stopped right in front of Tiny Tim's hiding-place. "It will be a tight fit, but perhaps we can squeeze in somehow."

"You're mistaken about that," decided Billy Whiskers, leaping out and standing in front of Tiny Tim who quickly followed. Like a flash the big goat bounded forward and sent the intruder sprawling upon the floor of the car.

"It's a goat!" cried the other man, as he helped his companion to his feet. "And there's a boy, too. They must have been hiding in the reaper."

"Well, they're not going to hide there any longer," declared the first fellow angrily. "I'll kill that goat if I can find anything to hit him with. And we'll have to do something with the boy. The cops will be looking for us at the next stop and we've got to get under

cover, and right away, too. It's as light as day. Anybody in the road can see us standing here."

"They're desperate fellows," thought Billy, in alarm. "They are trying to escape from the police, that's sure, and they won't stop at anything. Dear me, I wish Tiny Tim were safe on the ground. Then I could jump off and let them have the car all to themselves. We certainly can't stay here with them."

The old goat was truly worried, and looked around anxiously at Tiny Tim. Of one thing he was sure: he would do all he could to protect the little fellow. Was not Tiny Tim dependent upon him? What chance would the lad have in a struggle with those ruffians? None at all. Then his heart misgave him, and he almost groaned with dismay, for there was little chance of fighting two men at such close quarters. The space between the reaper and the edge of the car was too narrow and if the two men chose to approach from opposite sides at the same time, he could attack only one of them.

"We can't fight them, Billy," Tiny Tim whispered, as the two strangers drew back for a moment and talked excitedly. "We must jump off the train. It is barely moving up this grade and I think we can do it without getting hurt. I'll run down to the other end and swing off while they are talking. You come along, too, won't you?"

"Of course I will," thought Billy approvingly. "It is the only thing to do under the circumstances."

"You jump whenever you see a good place to land, won't you, old fellow?" Tiny Tim said in parting. "I'll whistle if I land safely."

If ever Billy longed to talk, it was now, but the very best he could do was to nod solemnly. In another moment Tiny Tim had darted to the other end of the car, climbed over the side and disappeared.

Billy waited anxiously until he heard a shrill whistle back down the track. Then, as both intruders began to advance evidently with some plan of action, he dashed to the side of the car, noticed they were passing a huge pile of sand and, thanking his lucky stars for such a soft landing-place, leaped over the edge.

Once again his amazing luck was with him, for he landed exactly in the center of the pile, and though his eyes and mouth and ears were full of sand, he was otherwise unharmed. He stood shaking himself when Tiny Tim hobbled up and threw his arms around the old goat's neck with a cry of delight. He had not been quite as fortunate as Billy and had turned his ankle slightly when he landed.

"Well, there goes our New Hampshire car, Billy," he said gravely, watching the light on the rear of the caboose until it disappeared in the distance. "And Pat Reilly, too, and the things he brought us this afternoon. Now we shall have to walk to Puddle Corners, I guess, and my ankle is so sore that I can't even start for a day or two. Talk about luck, Billy! Isn't it a shame when everything was going along so smoothly?"

"Good things never last long," Billy thought, with his remarkable philosophy, and wished he could comfort the disappointed lad.

"Well, I guess I'd better find a haystack somewhere and try to get some sleep," Tiny Tim said soberly. "Perhaps my ankle will feel better in the morning and things will look brighter."

"Suits me to a T," Billy agreed, wishing that he could express his hearty approval. He could smell fields of clover and hear a stream somewhere near, and could think of nothing better than a chance to stretch his cramped legs and eat and drink until he was absolutely satisfied.

Not far away some farm buildings were plainly visible in the bright moonlight, and beside them stood a tall stack of hay. Leaning upon Billy's broad back, Tiny Tim limped slowly to it. He made himself a soft little bed on the sheltered side of the haystack where he fell asleep almost as soon as he closed his eyes, whereupon Billy Whiskers wandered away and browsed contentedly in the clover field beyond.

CHAPTER V

AT THE POPPLEHOPPER HOME

AFTER two glorious hours in the clover field, Billy Whiskers sank down amid the dewy blossoms, delighted to stretch out after so many days of cramped quarters, and slept soundly until morning.

He awoke much later than usual and was ashamed of himself for neglecting Tiny Tim, who might have needed him or awakened and been greatly disturbed to find him gone. The anxious goat hurried across the field and ran around the haystack just in time to see a man with upraised pitchfork standing before Tiny Tim who was struggling to his feet.

To Billy, the scene was most alarming. He did not know that the gesture of the farmer was one of pure astonishment and terror for he discovered the boy asleep in the very spot where the pitchfork would have been an instant later. Billy didn't know either that the man's face was kindly, that his eyes were blue and twinkling. He didn't stop to see. He thought Tiny Tim was being attacked and he rushed forward and butted the farmer headfirst into the haystack.

A moment later Billy's astonishment equaled his victim's. When

the man sat up and turned to face his attacker, Billy's eyes popped wide open in surprise.

"Grandpa Popplehopper!" he thought, incredulously.

"Billy Whiskers!" cried Grandpa Popplehopper as he scrambled to his feet and hurried to the goat's side. Quickly he searched for a small scar on Billy's head and another upon his flank, and when he had found them he fairly danced up and down with excitement.

"It *is* Billy Whiskers, the old rascal!" he exclaimed in delight. "Wherever did he come from already yet?"

"He came with me," replied Tiny Tim, who had watched the encounter first with dismay, then with amazement. "Do you know him? Is it really Billy Whiskers?"

"Do I *know* him!" laughed Grandpa Popplehopper. "I should say I do! As well as anybody can know a goat. Didn't we go touring together last year—Billy Whiskers unt his pals, Button unt Stubby, unt the MacGregors unt us? I should say we did, unt a grand time was had by all. You ask Grandma Popplehopper. All the time this goat was in more mischief dan any oder two goats. Such dings he did I nefer saw, before or since. He was in trouble all the time, unt Button unt Stubby, too. The cutest tricks they did, all of dem. Many times haf Gretchen unt I chuckled at the pranks dose three were up to. Dere was the time in the hotel when Billy stole the apple unt went running through the dining-room unt kitchen, upsetting all

kinds of dings! Such doings I nefer saw! And lots of other times, too. But I vill not tell you now. Come up to the house unt see Grandma Popplehopper. You look hungry, young feller, unt Grandma will be so glad. She likes better than anything to see people hungry."

"Well, that sounds good to me," Tiny Tim declared, limping along beside the excited old gentleman. "I don't believe there is enough in the house to fill me up."

"Enough unt den some," laughed Grandpa Popplehopper. "Always in the Popplehopper house dere is enough to eat. You must eat a lot if you want to please Grandma, young feller. Den she will be happy. Unt when you haf eaten at least a dozen of her buckwheat cakes, you can tell us all about yourself unt how you happened to be traveling with Billy Whiskers. Unt you come along to the house, too, Billy," he continued, tweaking Billy's whiskers, "unt let Grandma haf a good look at you. Remember how she tried to buy you from Mr. Vatson? She has always thought you were the finest goat in the world, you old rascal!"

Well, to make a long story short, Grandma Popplehopper *was* delighted to see Billy Whiskers and said she only wished that he could talk and tell her all about Stubby and Button, who, if you remember, traveled all the way from Wisconsin to Yellowstone Park in the Popplehopper car and became the pets of the jolly old couple.

"You sly old rascal, you!" she laughed, holding up a fat sugared doughnut so that Billy would have to stand upon his hind legs in order to reach it. "You look exactly as if you could talk, so wise you are with dose big eyes of yours. But if you can't talk you can surely eat, as I know well. Don't I remember how you ate last summer yet? Dere now, try the doughnut and see if it is goot."

While Billy Whiskers munched away on the doughnut and some cookies, Grandma Popplehopper bustled about in her shining kitchen and prepared a wonderful breakfast for Tiny Tim. Not a question did either of the old people ask until he had eaten all of the buckwheat cakes and syrup and ham and eggs and doughnuts and preserves that he could possibly hold. When at last he explained that he really did not dare to eat another morsel, Grandma Popplehopper led the way out upon the sunny porch and there the wise, kind-hearted couple plied him with questions until he had told all his story.

"So it is to New Hampshire that you are going," said Grandpa Popplehopper thoughtfully when their visitor had finished. "Vell, vell, that is strange. Is that vere the White Mountains are?"

"Oh, yes," replied Tiny Tim eagerly. "They are all around Happy Valley. That is where Puddle Corners is, you know."

"Then it is the very place that we are going, is it not so, Popper?" declared Grandma Popplehopper. "Soon we were leaving on our vacation. West we haf been, but East, nefer. Unt we haf a new car to take the place of the old one that fell to pieces in Yellowstone Park, so it vill only take us two or three days to get dere. Is it not so, Popper?"

"Right you are, Gretchen," agreed Grandpa, smiling. "Like a bird does the new car fly ofer the roads."

"Unt we can take Tiny Tim mit us, can we not, Popper?" suggested Grandma, excitedly.

"Of course," Grandpa Popplehopper declared. "What a fine idea that is, Gretchen! To go anywhere, it is better to have some place to go, unt now we shall go to Uncle Dan's and see vat an eastern farm looks like."

"You'll like Uncle Dan and Aunt Hetty and the farm and everything!" Tiny Tim cried, enthusiastically, "and they will be glad to see you, too. You can catch fish right in the river in front of Uncle Dan's, and you can sit right on the porch and see the finest scenery in the state."

Just then Tiny Tim noticed Billy Whiskers staring at the group with his great mournful eyes, apparently as interested in the conversation as were any of the others.

"But what shall we do with him?" the puzzled lad demanded.

It was quite certain that the kind-hearted old couple would not offer to transport the big goat to New Hampshire in their new car, so what could be done about it? He did so want to take the famous goat back to Puddle Corners. In fact, he wasn't sure that he wanted to go back at all without him.

"I vill make a crate unt we vill send him back to Mr. Vatson," Grandpa Popplehopper suggested, patting Billy Whiskers' woolly back. "Mr. Vatson vill be worried about him anyvay unt it would

be foolish to take him to New Hampshire and back again, is it not so, Gretchen?"

"Foolish it would be," agreed Grandma Popplehopper. "The new car is no place for a goat. He would eat the pretty new upholstery right off the seats, would you not, you old rascal?"

"I would *not!*" thought Billy Whiskers, angrily. "Don't they give me credit for any brains at all? Of course I wouldn't harm anything belonging to the Popplehoppers. The very idea! And as for going back to the Watsons', nothing is further from my thoughts. I have started for New Hampshire, and I am going there. I hate to leave Tiny Tim, for he will feel bad, but he would feel just as bad if they shipped me back home, so it all amounts to the same thing. I'll leave this very night, and if I have any kind of luck at all, I'll arrive in New Hampshire sometime before the summer is over."

That evening Grandpa Popplehopper shut Billy Whiskers inside the barnyard with the other animals and thought that he would be safe there, for the fence was high and none of the goats that he had owned had ever been able to jump over it.

Just before darkness fell, Tiny Tim came hobbling out of the house and slipped a cookie through the bars to his faithful companion.

"I'm so sorry that you can't go on with me," he said regretfully, stroking the old goat's head. "I wanted to show you to the boys and

girls at Puddle Corners. If I were only bigger and stronger, I would start out tonight and we would get there somehow. But I guess it would be too far for me to walk, and besides, the Popplehoppers are so kind and thoughtful that I can't bear to make them feel bad."

"Don't you worry!" Billy Whiskers thought, and wished he could say it. "I'll do my best to get to Puddle Corners, Tiny Tim."

A few minutes later after the lights in the farmhouse had blinked out, Billy Whiskers gave a flying leap, cleared the fence and landed with a thump on the grass beyond. For a moment he stood looking up at the window where he had seen Tiny Tim preparing for bed, and then he trotted swiftly out of the yard and turned east. Somewhere, far off under the rising moon, lay New Hampshire and the home town of Tiny Tim.

CHAPTER VI

BILLY JOINS A CIRCUS

BILLY WHISKERS traveled eastward until toward morning. Then he turned into a field, ate a hearty breakfast and napped for a while. When he awoke the sun was rising and he jumped up and trotted briskly down the road until he came to a broad paved highway where he saw the old familiar Yellowstone Trail signs which, Gene MacGregor had told him, led from one great ocean to the other. They were yellow signs painted on telephone poles, fence posts and bridges all along the way.

"If I just follow them in the direction that the sun rises every day I'll get to New Hampshire sometime," Billy reasoned, with truly remarkable logic, and hastened on toward his distant goal.

Time passed swiftly for the happy goat as it always did when he was traveling. There were so many things to see along the road, and so many things to eat, too—pails of garbage in the alleys, fields of clover, orchards of ripening fruit and acres of vegetables.

That afternoon he came to the outskirts of a big city. Here he stopped in dismay, recalling his many unpleasant experiences with policemen, firemen and others, who seemed to think that a goat had

no right whatever to be at large within the city limits. Children followed him, too, shouting and laughing, and crowds gathered wherever he went, so that he was always conspicuous and in danger of being locked in the pound where they kept all the stray animals.

"I must try to go around that city," Billy decided, nervously. "I don't want to be put behind bars or in a pound again. There must be fields all around the city. If I can only get through them I will surely come back to the highway in time."

It didn't sound like a difficult undertaking, but it was. There were miles of railroad yards, deep rivers which Billy was obliged to cross on railroad bridges, and ponds and swamps and marshes, so when evening came he had not progressed very far in spite of much exertion.

The sun was just setting when he noticed some huge circus tents in a field ahead and a moment later faint strains of band music were wafted to his ears.

"A circus!" Billy exclaimed, his fatigue instantly forgotten. There was nothing in the world that he enjoyed more than a circus. Just to wander aimlessly in the noisy crowd was a delight in itself, for he loved the hurly-burly and excitement as well as the many tidbits that were to be picked up on the grounds. Accordingly, he trotted hastily across the intervening fields, leaping over fences or

wriggling under them until he came to the first of the circus tents.

Here and there he wandered among the side shows and cook tents without attracting much attention, for circus people are too accustomed to animals to notice a lone white goat. Billy approached the big tent where the performers dressed and as he hesitated near the entrance he heard voices through the canvas partition. Very cautiously he peered around the canvas flap and saw two clowns busily engaged in putting on their make-up.

"Brace up, Jim," the larger of the two clowns was saying earnestly. "You can be funny without that old goat of yours. It would make anyone laugh just to look at you, lad."

"But I'm *not* funny," the smaller clown insisted. "It was old Ned that was funny, Tom. He was a born clown—the whole act all by himself. I haven't had a laugh out of the crowd since he was run over, and the boss says I'm through if I don't make 'em laugh. He says he's paying for laughs, not looks. He'll let me go tonight sure if I can't put something over this afternoon."

"And better off you'd be," Tom declared solemnly. "You're a bright lad, and educated, too. You don't want to be a clown all your life."

"No, *sir!*" agreed the other emphatically. "That isn't why I'm here. I needed the money. Mother was ill and there was no one else to take care of her, so when they offered me such good money

for my act—or rather, old Ned's act—I couldn't well refuse. My, what a goat he was, Tom! I trained him from the day he was born, and the old fellow could almost talk, he was so wise. If I could only find another young goat with half his intelligence maybe I could teach him to clown too."

"What about me?" thought Billy quickly. "I'm not old. I feel as young as I ever did, and as for having half the intelligence of any other goat, I'll show them about that. *Half* the intelligence, indeed!" With that he walked into the room where the two clowns were sitting and stood up on his hind legs in his very best manner as much as to say, "Well, here I am. What do you think of *me?*"

"Great Scott! Am I seeing things?" Tom demanded, rubbing his eyes. "Is this a *goat?*"

"It certainly looks like one, and a most extraordinary one, at that," cried Joe, leaping up and examining Billy curiously. "Now where in the world did he come from?"

"He's an answer to prayer," the older clown declared, almost reverently. "Come now, did you ever hear of anything like that before? You were wishing for a goat, and here he is! And they say miracles don't happen!"

"Beats anything I ever heard of," agreed Joe, stroking Billy's neck and looking him over carefully. "Say, just the same this fellow *is* a fine goat. Look at his face. Why, the old rascal can almost talk.

Wish he were younger so that I could teach him some tricks."

"Young, indeed!" thought Billy, in exasperation. "Why do they keep harping on that? As if I were old! His goat wasn't a bit smarter than I am. I'll show him!"

His sharp eyes noticed an old torn clown suit lying on the floor and he stepped toward it and tried to stick his head through the opening in the top.

"Look at that!" shouted Joe in amazement. "He wants to put on Ned's clown suit."

"Wants to eat it probably," laughed the other.

"No, sir. He wants to put it on," insisted Joe, and quickly helped Billy into the suit. Then he clapped an old battered clown's hat on Billy's head, put a battered tin banjo in his arms and stood back, roaring with laughter.

"He's even funnier than old Ned," he declared enthusiastically. "He's a trained goat, too. Anyone could see that. Perhaps he can clown. I'll try him out and see."

"There goes the music for our next act," Tom cried, still chuckling. "Take your new pet along. If he can only walk around on his hind feet and look as funny as that he'll bring down the house."

"Come on, old fellow," Joe said, laughing as he led Billy toward the entrance of the big tent. "Now you listen and I'll tell you what you must do inside. You're to play the banjo while I am singing, see?

And every time I hit a wrong note you must hit me on the head. Then you must butt me to the ground and stand over me while you play the banjo. You see, I am a ventriloquist, and I'll make it appear you are talking. It's easy enough, old fellow. Just do as I tell you."

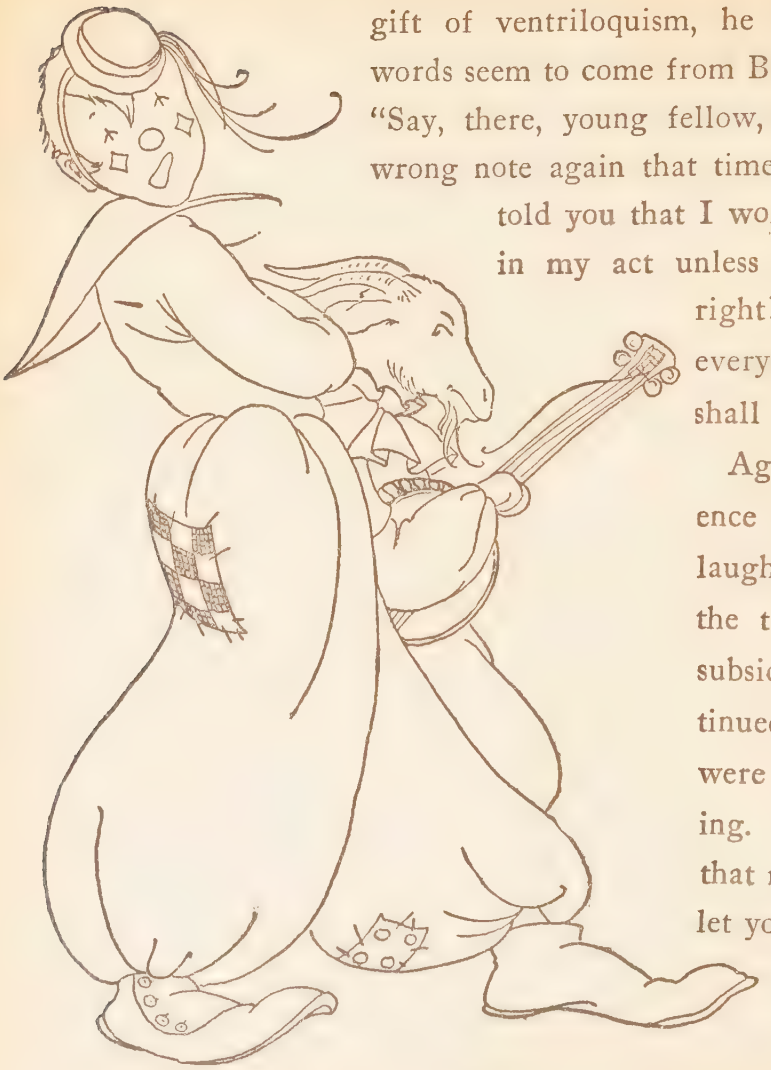
He was so much in earnest that the other clown laughed. "You don't expect a goat to understand all that, do you?" he joked. "Any one would think he was human to hear you talking to him."

"Well, Ned was—almost," Joe assured him stubbornly. "I used to talk to him just like that and he understood. You know he did! And this goat is clever, too. I can tell. I know a lot about goats."

"Well, we'll see," laughed Tom and called the attention of the other clowns to the new arrival.

As they all ran out into the ring whooping and blowing horns and performing all sorts of antics, Joe held Billy back until the others were half-way around the big tent. Then he and Billy Whiskers started slowly around the ring.

By this time the attention of the crowd was on the two and it became quiet all along the line as Joe began to sing in a very fine voice. Billy accompanied him by drawing one hoof across the steel strings of the banjo. Then Joe sang a wrong note which he made so high and funny that Billy couldn't help recognizing it, and the wise old goat hit him on the head with the banjo. Joe fell flat upon the ground to the huge delight of the audience. There he lay as if dead until the



crowd quieted down. Then, using his gift of ventriloquism, he made these words seem to come from Billy's mouth: "Say, there, young fellow, you hit the wrong note again that time. Haven't I told you that I won't have you in my act unless you sing it right? You'll spoil everything and I shall lose my job."

Again the audience roared with laughter. When the tumult had subsided Joe continued as if Billy were still speaking. "Now sing that right and I'll let you get up."

Whereupon Joe sang the song correctly, jumped to his feet, and continued on down the ring while the crowd roared its approval and delight.

Thus it went all the way around the great tent. As they went through the exit, all of the clowns and many of the other circus people were waiting to see the new performer, and were as generous with their praise as only circus people know how to be.

"Best clown act I ever saw," declared the manager, pushing his way through the crowd. "Your pay is raised from this minute, Joe. Where did you get that goat?"

"He just came," Joe explained, while the others stared wide-eyed. "I was just wishing for a goat and there he was."

"Fairy story," muttered the manager, who thought that for some reason Joe was unwilling to tell where he had found the goat. "Just the same, wherever you found him, don't let him get away. I wouldn't have anything happen to him for a thousand dollars."

"Neither would I," agreed Joe, and led Billy away to his dressing-room where he fed him candy bit by bit until the happy goat could eat no more.

CHAPTER VII

A STRANGE FRIENDSHIP

THAT Billy was very happy in his new role goes without saying, for Joe treated him as if he were the most wonderful animal in the world. He liked the circus life, too, and enjoyed every minute of the performance in the ring. He quickly learned other bits of Ned's old act, and soon surpassed the other goat, as even Joe admitted.

"He's really smarter than old Ned ever was," he told Tom the following morning. "It is much easier to teach him. You wouldn't think he was an old goat the way he picks up things."

"Old goat, indeed!" thought Billy, indignantly. "Why does everybody keep harping on this age business? What difference does it make how old I am if I only act and feel young?"

He stalked away stiff-legged, as he always did when he was peeved or angry, and turned toward the animal tent which he never tired of visiting. It was thrilling to hear the poor caged creatures tell of their lives in far-away countries, and Billy spent hours wandering from one cage to another listening to the different tales of life in jungle and desert.

He liked to watch the elephants, too, though the huge creatures seemed to dislike him for some unexplained reason and stamped and trumpeted when he approached. He always stood at a safe distance when they were fed, and marveled at the dexterity with which they used their long flexible trunks as they sprayed water over their backs and tossed straw into the air. He noticed that they were as fond of peanuts and sweets as he was himself.

Only Mumba, the largest elephant of them all, ever deigned to speak to him, and then in the most surly manner, though Billy knew that the big animal must have all sorts of interesting tales locked up in her head, Joe having remarked once that Mumba was very, very old and as wise as any elephant that ever lived.

"I wish I could make her talk," Billy thought, as he approached the elephants and saw her pulling impatiently at her peg. Her long trunk was sweeping the ground in a vain endeavor to reach something beyond, and she strained at the heavy chain until it seemed as if the iron anklet which she wore must cut her leg.

"What is it she wants?" thought Billy, edging cautiously nearer. It was suppertime and there were few people in the tent, so Billy soon found what it was that Mumba was trying to get. It was a candy bar that had been dropped to the ground about six inches beyond her reach.

"I will get it for you if you would like to have me," Billy offered

politely, for he did not dare to approach nearer unless Mumba gave him some assurance of friendly intentions. He didn't care to be picked up and thrown to the ground among the elephants, not he!

"Wish you would," growled Mumba, staring at the big white goat in surprise. "I've been trying to reach it for the last two hours and I'm about at the end of my patience."

"She *sounds* friendly enough," Billy thought, rather doubtfully. He plucked up courage and picked up the candy bar, stepping forward rather gingerly to drop it within reach of Mumba's swinging trunk.

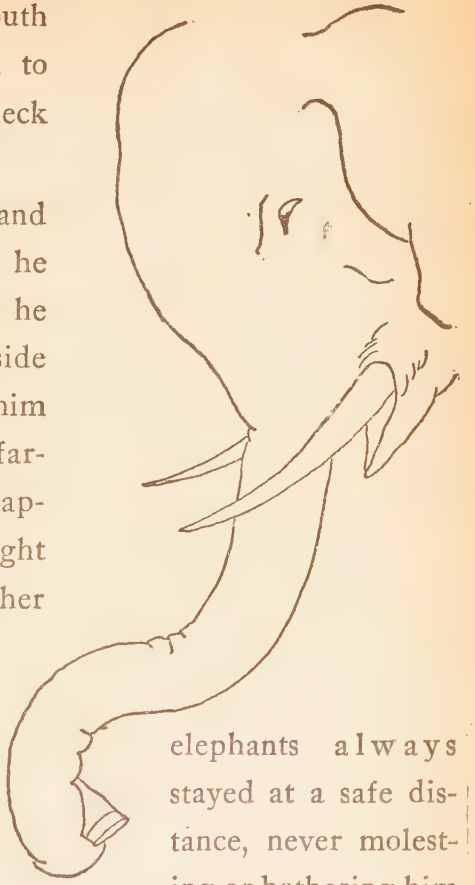
"Very much obliged," Mumba said, as Billy backed away to a safe distance. "I'll do as much for you sometime."

That was the beginning of a strange friendship between Billy and the cross old elephant, a friendship that everybody in the circus was soon discussing. None of them ever knew that it was all brought about by a small chocolate bar and a little courage on the part of Billy Whiskers.

Within a short time Billy became very fond of his huge friend and took her all kinds of tidbits which the circus people showered upon their new clown. By the end of the week Mumba had become really affectionate and stood all day eagerly watching for the approach of the big goat. As soon as he appeared Mumba would begin to trumpet with joy, and when Billy gave her a piece of candy

she would put it quickly in her mouth and down would come the trunk to pass affectionately over Billy's neck and head.

At first he was rather frightened and nervous, but as time passed and he found that he had nothing to fear, he often lay down close by Mumba's side while the wise old elephant told him absorbing stories of life in the far-away jungle, of how she had been captured, put aboard a ship and brought to America. To his relief, the other elephants always stayed at a safe distance, never molesting or bothering him in any way, for Mumba's word was evidently law among her fellows.



One night Billy overheard Joe telling Jim that Mumba's circus days were about over. She was growing too cross and irritable, and too likely to go into a terrific rage at the slightest provocation. Both the keeper and the manager lived in constant fear that she would run amuck and do some serious damage. And that is exactly what happened.

CHAPTER VIII

BILLY WINS A MEDAL

ONE morning the circus was having its parade through the streets of a small city. Billy Whiskers was walking sedately along beside Mumba's swinging trunk when some malicious person threw a giant firecracker right under the big animal's body. The explosion that followed undoubtedly burnt her and sent her into a rage terrible to behold.

Down the street Mumba raced, smashing everything within reach, the ornate howdah on her back swaying from side to side. The girl in the howdah—who happened to be an acrobat—slid quickly to the ground and escaped injury.

"She'll kill someone," Billy thought frantically, as he watched the maddened elephant seize an ice cream and candy booth on the curb and send the flimsy structure flying in all directions. "She's having one of those tantrums Joe told about. I *must* stop her before anything terrible happens."

Without any definite plan he set off in pursuit. As he passed the wrecked ice cream stand, his gaze fell upon several candy bars scattered in the street.

"I'll take one of those along with me," Billy decided instantly. "She evidently didn't notice the candy there. Perhaps she will listen to me, for she loves candy." So down the street he raced, the candy bar in his mouth.

If Billy hadn't fully realized the gravity of the situation he would have been decidedly amused at the many ludicrous happenings along the street—people crowding into stores and doorways; dignified men climbing telephone poles; a fat policeman on top of a fountain, just out of reach of Mumba's trunk, while she angrily sprayed him with water from the basin beneath; Mumba halting a street car by putting her head against it and pushing it off the track while the occupants shrieked with fright; a little fat dog running so far into a culvert that he couldn't back out again, his tail waving agitatedly in the air as he tried to extricate himself. All of these things Billy saw but it didn't occur to him that they were funny. His one idea was to stop the maddened animal and bring her back again.

When he reached her side, he dropped the candy bar upon the ground.

"Here's a candy bar, Mumba," he said, striving to speak calmly.

Mumba stopped spraying the policeman for a moment when she heard Billy's voice and turned quickly, her eyes red and gleaming with anger. For a moment Billy's heart skipped a beat or two, she looked so ferocious.

"It's a peanut bar, the kind you like best," he went on, his voice trembling in spite of himself.

Mumba's trunk began to sway from side to side and move slowly forward. For a moment, Billy stood tense and ready to leap away, for he wasn't at all sure whether it was himself or the candy bar that the elephant had in mind. But it was the candy bar, after all, for Mumba's trunk darted suddenly forward and seized the candy.

"There are plenty more just like that one," Billy suggested quickly.

"Where?" Mumba demanded.

"Right up the street," Billy said, hardly daring to believe his good luck.

"Let's go and get them," Mumba proposed, her rage completely forgotten in her greed for more candy. Turning, she followed Billy back up the street to the spot where the candy and empty cones were scattered all over the ground.

"Help yourself," Mumba invited, her mouth full of candy bars. "You like candy as well as I do, Billy. We might as well make the most of this opportunity. It won't last long." She tossed him a very fat marshmallow bar. "Try one of those," she suggested; "I think they're fine."

"They certainly are," Billy agreed, so excited that he could hardly swallow the delicious confection.

And there they stood, the two of them, surrounded by candy and cones, when Joe and Mumba's keeper came running up.

"That goat's the one who stopped the rumpus," cried the wet policeman who came hurrying up. "He picked up a piece of candy and gave it to the elephant. Then he brought her back here. I saw it with my own eyes."

"I saw the whole performance, too," asserted a storekeeper, joining the crowd. "That's a pretty wise goat, if anybody should ask me. He used his head when none of us knew what to do. If it hadn't been for him that wild elephant would have torn up the place. The city ought to give him a medal."

Believe it or not, that is what actually happened. Perhaps the city or the circus manager saw a chance for welcome publicity. But whatever the cause, during the evening performance Billy was led to the center of the big ring and decorated with a bronze medal which the manager showed to a delighted audience while he recounted the story of Billy's exploit in the afternoon.

"To a very brave goat for a very brave deed," ran the inscription, which Joe read aloud when Billy returned to the dressing room. "My, I'm awfully proud of you, Billy! It isn't every goat who earns a bronze medal."

"What do I care about an old medal!" Billy thought, impatiently. "Not even a goat can eat a thing like that. Why didn't they give me candy? I would have appreciated it much more." With which ungrateful thought he wandered around to the animal tent to tell poor Mumba—double-chained because of her rampage—all about it.

CHAPTER IX

A BALLOON STOWAWAY

IT MUST not be thought for a moment that circus life was all a bed of roses for the happy old goat. Every night the circus was hustled on board a train after the evening show, and Billy's quarters were dark and stuffy although Joe kept him plentifully supplied with food. Every morning the train stopped at another town and was unloaded for another circus day. Sometimes they made very short runs and by the end of the week Billy had begun to fret.

"We shall never get to New Hampshire at this rate," he grumbled. "To be sure, it isn't so bad here with the circus, and everybody treats me fine, but I started out for New Hampshire and there I'm going. I wouldn't disappoint Tiny Tim for anything. Joe is jolly and kind and I like him, but he isn't Tiny Tim. Dear me, dear me! I really don't know what to do. I would leave the circus and start out again tonight, but there's Joe to think of. It would spoil his act, and then what would his poor mother do? Was ever a goat in such a pickle?"

That very evening Billy's dilemma was settled for him in a most unexpected manner, for Joe received a telegram from his mother

telling him to come home at once as an uncle had passed away and left them a large sum of money.

"But I'll take you along, old fellow," Joe declared happily, as he patted Billy and fed him a candy bar. "I'll put you in a clover field and give you plenty to eat and drink as long as you live. Don't you worry! I'll take care of you in your old age."

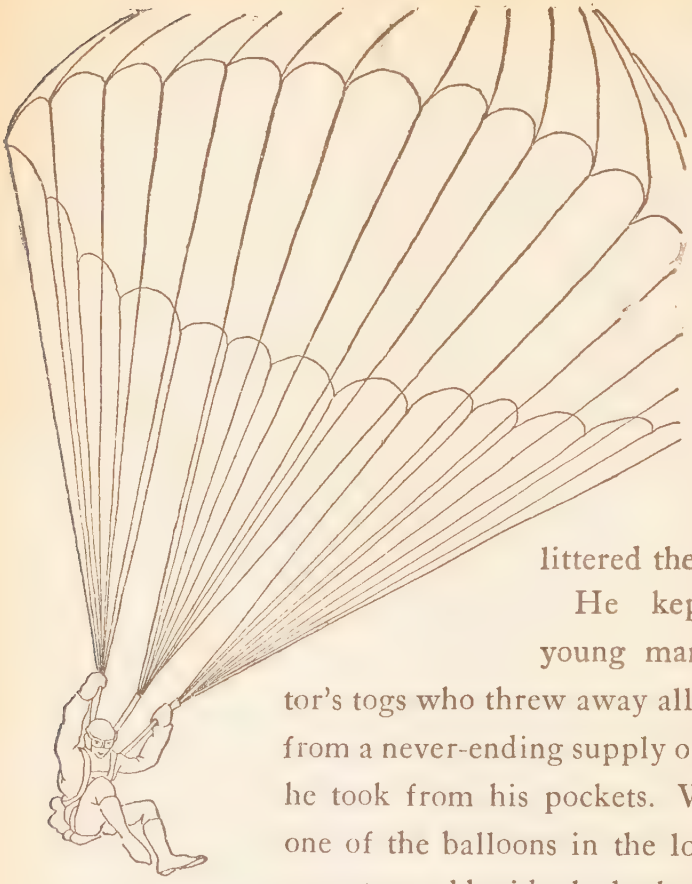
"Old age!" snorted Billy angrily. "Put me in a field, indeed! Not Billy Whiskers! Old age! Hm! I'll put an end to that notion right now before Joe ties me up."

He watched his chance, and while Joe was talking to his friends, slipped out of the tent and hurried to find Mumba. She almost wept when she heard the news and stroked him lovingly with her trunk as she said good-bye. Billy felt bad too, but he trotted hastily away from the circus grounds and turned toward the rising moon.

For a while the traffic was heavy with people departing from the circus grounds, but after an hour he found himself all alone on a broad highway where, even in the moonlight, he could see the yellow signs that indicated his route. Near morning he slept a little, but sunrise found him once more hurrying toward his distant goal.

Early in the afternoon he came to an aviation field over which many aeroplanes hovered. On the field there was a long line of anchored balloons around which a great crowd had gathered.

"I'm going over there," Billy decided quickly. "There are always



good things to eat where there is a crowd." He cleared the fence with one bound, and a few minutes later was mingling with the people, searching for tidbits, which, as he predicted, littered the flying field.

He kept following one young man dressed in aviator's togs who threw away all the crusts of bread from a never-ending supply of sandwiches which he took from his pockets. When they reached one of the balloons in the long line, the young man stopped beside the basket, threw an overcoat and a small package inside, examined everything carefully, then, with an exclamation of disgust, ran quickly back across the field.

Other men were working around the balloons and Billy Whiskers heard one of them say that the race would start in a few minutes.

Then something happened to one of the planes overhead and every eye was turned skyward. Suddenly there came a little spurt of flame and the pilot leaped out in his parachute just in time to escape the explosion which followed.

During the pandemonium that ensued Billy saw a golden opportunity. No one was looking at the balloons. No one paid the slightest attention to the innocent-looking old goat. So, with a quick leap, Billy jumped into the basket and chewed frantically at the one guy rope that held the balloon to the ground. Fortunately for him, the rope was old and it was an easy matter to break the strands, else a different story would have to be told.

As it was, long before the excitement attending the burning plane and the aviator's drop had subsided, the balloon had begun to drift upward, rising slowly above the field with Billy's white whiskers hanging out over the edge as he gazed, chuckling, at the milling throng on the ground.

More excitement reigned on the field below, of course, when the escape of the balloon was noticed, but before anyone could decide what to do about it or think of any way to bring it to earth again, it had drifted too far to make any plan practicable. Two planes started off in pursuit, it is true, but when the pilots drew near and saw the face of the old goat peering out over the edge, they roared with laughter and refused to approach any nearer the basket lest

they puncture the big gas bag with a wing of their planes and send the funny old fellow to an untimely death.

For a while they followed along beside the balloon like a couple of playful children, but as neither of the aviators had the right kind of grappling hook, and as Billy had gnawed off the guy rope at the very edge of the basket, there seemed to be nothing to do but leave the rider to his fate and hope that the balloon would come safely to earth without any mishap.

"The balloon that goes the farthest gets a thousand dollars!" shouted one of the aviators laughingly as he turned back to the field. "Perhaps you'll get it, old-timer. If you do, send me a box of candy."

"A thousand dollars!" thought Billy in astonishment. "My, how I would like to get it! I'd give every penny of it to Tiny Tim."

CHAPTER X

BILLY SENDS A MESSAGE

NOW there is one thing that can be said with all honesty about Billy Whiskers. He certainly was no coward. Strange events and dire mishaps left him unmoved by any fear. So it was this time. In spite of the fact that he was riding in a frail little basket high above the earth, he was not afraid. But then, he had been up in the air before; perhaps that explains it. Still he didn't know where he was drifting or how he was to get down, and those two things alone would have made anybody else slightly nervous, to say the least.

Billy, however, looked over the edge of the basket from time to time and really enjoyed his strange adventure. He would have been delighted beyond measure if he could have known that the balloon was headed straight for New Hampshire, borne along by a strong southwest wind. The flying field was soon left far behind and a succession of lakes and rivers began to dot the landscape below as it passed over the lake region of eastern New York.

As evening approached, the stowaway became sleepy and curled up as best he could in the bottom of the basket. Then it was that he

discovered the package of lunch which the young man had tossed inside with his coat.

"What luck!" Billy Whiskers thought, munching the doughnuts and cheese and apples that he found. "There's always food even in the clouds if you're lucky!"

All night long the balloon drifted slowly on, and all night long Billy slept on with never a tremor of fear at his strange predicament. When the moon rose and he saw that he must be moving eastward, he was completely satisfied and slept soundly throughout the night, waking just as the sun was rising like a huge ball of fire.

As he stood up to peer over the edge of the basket again, a flock of crows flew cawing by. To Billy's surprise one of them left the flock and flew over and alighted on the edge of the basket.

"Why, Billy Whiskers!" a familiar voice exclaimed. "Where *are* you going this time?"

"Well, if it isn't Black Wings!" Billy exclaimed, in great delight. "I'm going to New Hampshire, old friend. Where are *you* going?"

"We're going West again," Black Wings replied. "The leader of my flock will never stay anywhere long."

"If you go by Mr. Watson's, tell Nannie that you saw me," Billy Whiskers said quickly. "Only don't tell her where," he added as an afterthought. "She would be wild if she knew that I was riding in a balloon."

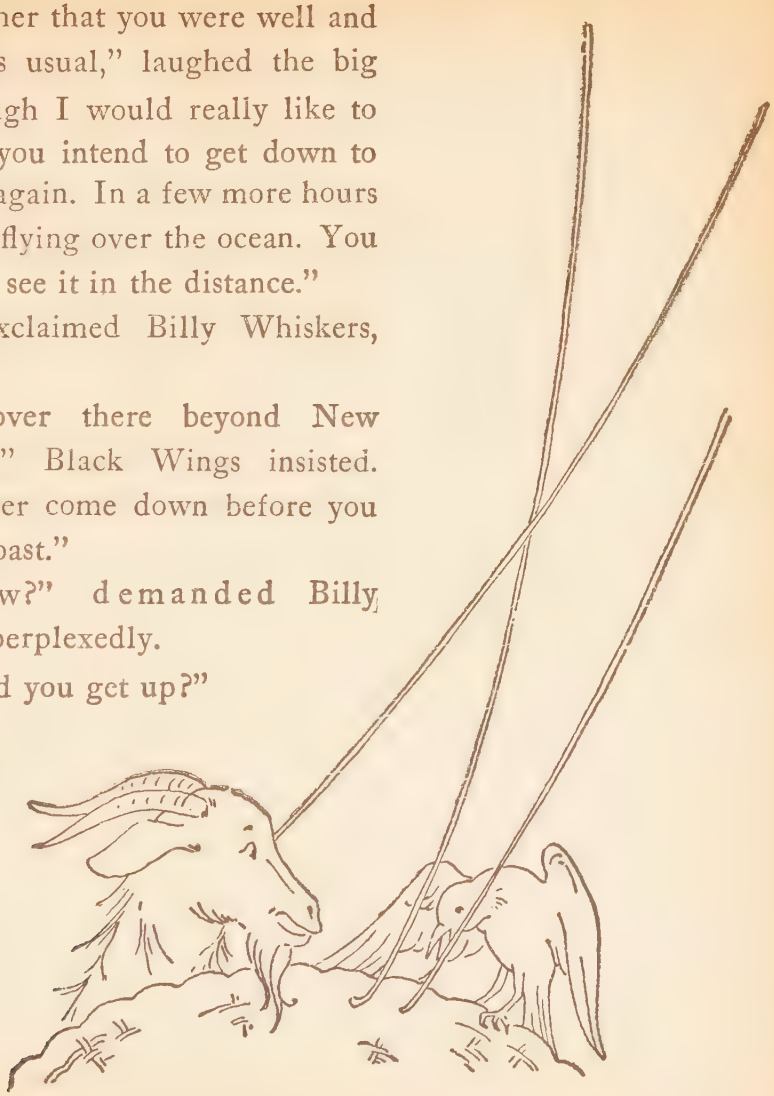
"I'll tell her that you were well and as happy as usual," laughed the big crow, "though I would really like to know how you intend to get down to the ground again. In a few more hours you will be flying over the ocean. You can already see it in the distance."

"No!" exclaimed Billy Whiskers, astonished.

"'Way over there beyond New Hampshire," Black Wings insisted. "You'd better come down before you reach the coast."

"But how?" demanded Billy Whiskers, perplexedly.

"How did you get up?"



"I gnawed a rope that held the balloon to the ground," Billy Whiskers explained thoughtfully.

"Well, if gnawing a rope got you up in the air, perhaps gnawing another will get you down," suggested Black Wings. "There's a rope hanging over there. Just imagine what a man would do if he were up here. That's just a guess on my part, for I don't know anything at all about balloons, but I always try to use my brain."

"I'll say you do," agreed Billy Whiskers. "You're the wisest bird I ever saw. Perhaps you are right again. You have always been so far. I'll follow your suggestion and see how it works out. Where is New Hampshire anyway?"

"Right over where all those high mountains and that long lake are," replied Black Wings. "It is a beautiful country but there isn't much corn so we never stay there long. Well, I must be going or I'll never catch up with the crowd. Here's hoping that you land safely, Billy."

"Luck has always been good to me," laughed Billy, watching his friend fly away into the west.

Perhaps Billy Whiskers took too much for granted this time. Perhaps it was a case of "pride goeth before a fall." Anyway, that afternoon when Billy Whiskers cautiously pulled the cord hanging from the big gas bag above, he opened the valves which released the gas and began slowly drifting downward toward the earth.

Billy peered over the edge of the basket in some concern and noted with satisfaction that he would probably land somewhere in a pretty little valley surrounded on all sides by high mountains.

"I wonder if it could possibly be Happy Valley," he pondered, as he saw the river flowing through the valley and the little cluster of houses at the junction of four or five roads. Somehow it seemed to be exactly as Tiny Tim had described Puddle Corners.

Down, down, down, Billy Whiskers drifted, but luck was not with him this time, for the balloon landed in a tree and the basket turned over and spilled poor Billy down through the branches, to land with a tremendous thud. For a moment he saw millions of stars and was conscious of pains in all parts of his anatomy. Then he floated off into a great black void and for a long time he knew nothing more.

CHAPTER XI

IN HAPPY VALLEY AT LAST

WHEN Tiny Tim awoke the morning after Billy Whiskers' departure, he dressed quickly in spite of the early hour and slipped out to the barnyard where his four-footed companion had been left the night before. Something told him that Billy Whiskers had gone. So when he reached the fence and leaned over it with repeated calls of "Billy Whiskers! Billy Whiskers! Where are you, old fellow?" he was not surprised to find no trace of the big white goat. Just as he had surmised, Billy Whiskers had departed in the night.

Not even Grandma Popplehopper's delicious breakfast could console Tiny Tim that morning. He had grown more and more devoted to the old goat ever since the clever rascal had brought him the box of lunch, and he realized, perhaps more than anybody else, just how very intelligent the big animal really was.

After breakfast Grandma Popplehopper telephoned all up and down the road, but nobody could be found who had even seen Billy Whiskers. The truth is, Billy had trotted along for many hours and had covered so many miles during the night that he was far beyond

the reach of Grandma's rural phone by eight o'clock that morning.

Poor Tiny Tim! Grandma and Grandpa Popplehopper watched the sorrowful lad with great concern and after much discussion decided to make arrangements to leave on their vacation as soon as possible and take the homesick youngster back to Uncle Dan's.

A few days later they started for New Hampshire in their shining new car. Through town after town they sped while Tiny Tim watched closely for any sign of Billy Whiskers. He couldn't help hoping that they would find the big white goat somewhere along the road. Time and again the kindly Popplehoppers stopped while the anxious lad sped to look at white calf or sheep or goat in a distant field, from which quest he always returned heartsick. He just couldn't believe that he was never to see his beloved Billy Whiskers again.

The time passed swiftly in spite of Tiny Tim's constant watch from the window, and almost before he could realize it they were driving into the yard in front of Uncle Dan's house. There they received a royal welcome, you may be sure. The Popplehoppers were given a big airy room overlooking the river and the supper table was set with all the good things that Aunt Hetty's larder afforded. Tiny Tim, happy lad, was patted and petted and stuffed with all his favorite viands and happiness once more reigned supreme in the Parker household.

The next day was Sunday and all day long friends and relatives called at the Parker place to greet Tiny Tim. Hours were spent listening to his adventures and when Billy Whiskers entered the story Grandma and Grandpa Popplehopper had much to add to the tale as they recounted some of the adventures of the famous old goat. The group on Uncle Dan's veranda was all agog with excitement as Grandpa Popplehopper related the story of Billy's mad exploit in the Yellowstone Park hotel, but right in the most exciting part of the recital one of the children pointed to a balloon which was floating slowly along not far above the valley.

Everybody rushed out upon the lawn and watched it in amazement, for balloons were rare indeed in the little northern valley and no one could imagine where it had come from.

"It's going to land!" Tiny Tim cried. "It's going to land right here!"

It was fortunate indeed that he couldn't see Billy Whiskers in the basket above, nor did anyone discover him until the balloon caught in a tree right there on the lawn and spilled the old goat and all the bags of ballast down through the branches.

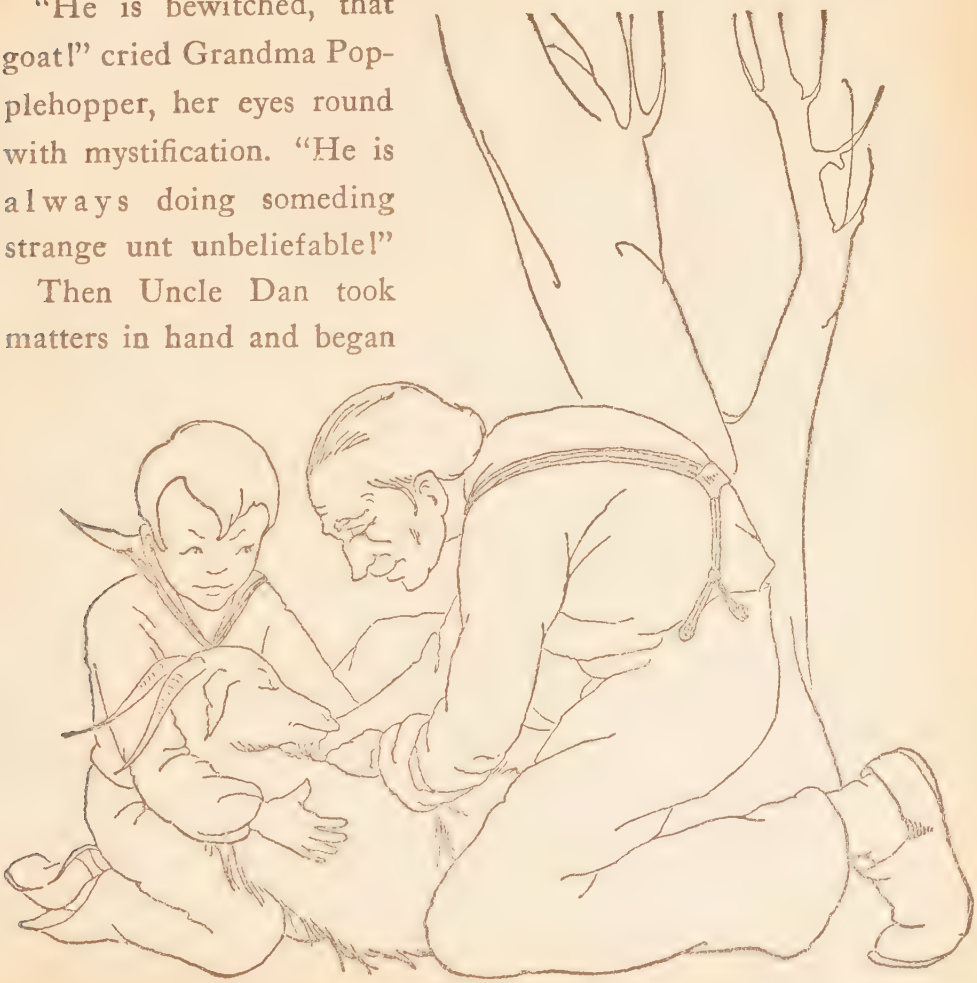
"It looks like Billy Whiskers!" Tiny Tim cried, running toward the unconscious goat.

"It *is* Billy Whiskers!" declared Grandpa Popplehopper, examining the prostrate goat for the scars which would establish his identity.

"It *is* Billy Whiskers," he declared as he tenderly turned him over. "But how is it possible that he could be in the balloon already yet?"

"He is bewitched, that goat!" cried Grandma Popplehopper, her eyes round with mystification. "He is always doing someding strange unt unbeliefable!"

Then Uncle Dan took matters in hand and began



to rub Billy Whiskers vigorously, assisted by others who had crowded around. Then, while they continued the rubbing, he examined the big goat carefully.

"I don't find a broken bone anywhere," he declared at last, greatly to Tiny Tim's relief. "He is still breathing, so perhaps the fall just stunned him."

"Oh, Billy Whiskers!" cried Tiny Tim, patting Billy's head with one hand while he wiped the tears away with the other. "Please don't die, Billy! Please don't!"

At that moment Billy Whiskers opened his eyes, saw Tiny Tim and the Popplehoppers and quickly closed them again, thinking that he must indeed be dreaming.

"He's going to be all right, son," Uncle Dan declared, patting Tiny Tim's shoulder. "He'll be running around here as frisky as ever in an hour or two."

"Sooner than that," thought Billy Whiskers, and opened his eyes wide this time. "I want to find out where I am and how it happens that Tiny Tim and the Popplehoppers are here. I left them back in Pennsylvania. Can it be possible that I was flying back toward home all the time?"

"Billy's all right! He's going to get up!" Tiny Tim shouted as Billy Whiskers staggered shakily to his feet, staring all around him with his great solemn eyes. Many people—a big white house—

mountains all around! It wasn't the Popplehopper place, that was certain.

"Here you are at Uncle Dan's, Billy!" Tiny Tim said laughingly, as he guessed the old goat's predicament. "How you happened to come here in the balloon, we can't guess, of course. It all seems like a fairy tale, but here you are, just where I wanted you to be, and I am tickled to death."

"It looks like a very good place to be," thought Billy Whiskers approvingly, and staggered over toward the veranda where a big pan of cornballs that Uncle Dan had just made looked most inviting.

"He's going to live all right," laughed Uncle Dan, lifting the pan up beyond Billy's reach, but handing the very largest cornball to the hungry goat. "You needn't worry about him any longer, Tiny Tim. It is your Uncle Dan who will have to worry from now on. Not a bit of a garden will I have in a week, or my name isn't Dan Parker!"

Billy Whiskers stopped nibbling the cornball and looked up at him reproachfully.

"I shan't touch your garden as long as there are other things to eat," he thought indignantly. "I guess I'm old enough to know my P's and Q's. As Nannie says, I know which side my bread is buttered on, and it's a well-known fact that one can't have one's cake and eat it too, so you should worry about your garden. I wouldn't

touch it on Tiny Tim's account if for no other reason—and anyway, there are plenty of other gardens, I am sure."

And Billy Whiskers kept his word. During all the weeks that he stayed at Uncle Dan's, he never once touched a thing in his marvelous garden though sometimes the temptation was almost too great to be borne. Sometimes, I am sorry to say, he nibbled a tender top or two in other gardens at Puddle Corners, but goats will be goats, you know, and vegetables are grown to be eaten, after all.

CHAPTER XII

BILLY IN DISGRACE

THE following week was one of the happiest in Billy Whiskers' long career. Strange as it may seem, there had not been a goat in the entire valley for many years, and Billy was an object of never-ending curiosity. Then, too, everybody had heard of the famous Billy Whiskers and his extraordinary appetite, and whenever Billy trotted down the street hitched to Tiny Tim's little cart, children as well as grown-ups came running out with bits of food—all sorts of things—in order to test for themselves just where the big goat would draw the line in his varied menu. So, as you can readily see, Billy was supplied with plenty of food—most of it good food, too, though once in a while a mischievous urchin would offer a rubber heel or a few nails, only to find that there are some things that a goat cannot and will not eat.

"I might try a rubber heel if I were hungry enough," Billy Whiskers chuckled, "but why spoil my digestion when there are so many good things to be had?"

It didn't take long for the clever goat to size up Tiny Tim's playmates, whose number greatly increased after Billy's arrival. He

quickly sorted the boys into two groups—the ones he liked and the ones he did not.

"Teddy Chandler, Tiny Tim's cousin and best friend, is a real boy," Billy decided. "Mischievous, of course—for what boy isn't?—but never cruel or mean like some of the others. I can't stand Ricky Phillips or Tommy Haines and I won't let them ride on my back again. They always pinch me or pull my whiskers or hit me with a stick. If they try it, I shall throw them off, no matter what Tiny Tim thinks."

Of the girls, Billy liked Barbara Bean best, though he was friendly to them all, and they always brought him tidbits and patted him lovingly whenever they were allowed to ride upon his back.

So for four whole days Billy behaved himself very well indeed; so well, in fact, that Grandma and Grandpa Popplehopper, who were still visiting at Uncle Dan's, exclaimed in wonder.

"Nefer once has he been in mischief already yet!" cried Grandma Popplehopper, unbelievingly. "Someding very strange there is about that, to be sure. It is as natural for Billy to be in mischief as it is for a child to be in the sugar. How he has changed, has he not, Popper?"

"His chums are not here, remember," replied Grandpa, smiling. "Perhaps, Gretchen, it was not the old goat after all that into mischief got. Perhaps it was your darling cat or mein leetle doggie that

started all the trouble. Nefer did I think so, to be sure, but maybe I vas mistaken, after all."

"Well, don't wish us any bad luck," laughed jolly Uncle Dan. "I don't mind having a *good* goat around, but a *bad* goat would be a different thing entirely."

"Not bad is he," explained Grandma Popplehopper quickly. "Joost mischievous. Into funny predicaments he gets, and sooch things."

But all good things come to an end, it seems, and so it was with Billy's good behavior, though in this case the old goat was not really half as black as he was painted.

One afternoon there was a lawn party and fair on the big shady lawn in front of the church. It was one of the chief events of the summer at Puddle Corners and throughout the afternoon people thronged the church lawn, ate ice cream and candy, and bought cakes, cookies, and all sorts of articles for sale in the different booths.

Billy Whiskers visited the fair with Tiny Tim and Teddy early in the afternoon. As they passed the different booths, Billy stopped and looked longingly at the luscious cakes and cookies. It would have been a temptation to anyone, this table of home-made dainties, for they were the very finest that the best cooks at Puddle Corners knew how to produce. To Billy, the temptation was almost irresistible, and if Aunt Hetty hadn't been tending that particular table

there is no doubt but what he would have endeavored to make off with one of the cakes. As it was, Aunt Hetty observed him standing near and shooed him away with a flip of her white apron.

After having freely patronized the ice cream and candy stands, the boys went back to Uncle Dan's and Billy, of course, was obliged to go with them. All the rest of the afternoon he lay under the big maple and thought about the long table covered with cakes.

"I never saw anything that looked as good as those cakes," he thought, longingly. "If I could only slip away, perhaps I could manage to get one."

But Tiny Tim kept a watchful eye on the big goat and Billy found no opportunity to put a somewhat vague plan into execution. Company came unexpectedly for supper, however, and Tiny Tim forgot the goat and ran into the house with the other children, leaving Billy Whiskers in the yard, instead of shutting him in the barn or fastening him to a long chain as he usually did.

This arrangement suited the wise old goat perfectly, and almost before Tiny Tim was in the house he had trotted off down the street toward the church and that table of luscious cakes.

As I said before, it was just supper time and the church lawn was nearly deserted. Only two ladies remained to watch and it happened that, as Billy came up, both of them went into the church to bring out another table.

Seeing no one about, Billy Whiskers warily approached the cake table. He was very hungry for he had had no supper and the tidbits which the children had given him all day had not been very filling. To his relief, plenty of cakes were left, and chocolate cakes, too, Billy's favorite kind.

In another moment he was standing beside the table with his front feet upon it, gazing at the cakes with shining eyes and trying to decide which one to eat first. He finally chose a large chocolate cake decorated with walnut halves and was just about to start nibbling it when a man darted out from behind some shrubbery and snatched the box of money which stood there upon the table.

Into his pockets he crammed the change and started for another table. Suddenly he stopped and apparently heard voices, for he turned, ran back past the cake table, snatched the very cake which Billy Whiskers had decided upon, darted into the shrubbery, and disappeared before the astonished goat could collect his wits and determine what was best to be done.

Billy's unusual slowness put him in a most embarrassing position, for at that very moment the two women came out of the church and saw Billy Whiskers still standing with his forefeet upon the table. Dropping their burden, the angry women rushed across the lawn, shouting: "Shoo, shoo! You bad goat! Oh, look! Mrs. Glover's chocolate cake is gone, and so is the money in the change box!"

Billy Whiskers jumped down, of course, and not knowing what else to do, he ran away as fast as he could go without having tasted so much as a morsel of the precious cake. Unfortunately, his great haste and guilty demeanor branded him a thief and changed the whole course of his existence at Puddle Corners. For the two ladies quickly spread the news of the theft of the cake and the money—the entire day's receipts of the cake table. Billy Whiskers had been standing there with his forefeet upon the table, they said, and the cake was gone and the money was gone, and there was no one else about, so it must have been he who took them. To be sure, it was rather strange that a goat should eat money, but where was it if he *hadn't* eaten it? The box was overturned and a few pieces of silver were lying on the grass, but the rest was gone, as was the big chocolate

cake. Where could the things be if Billy had not eaten them?

"I can't believe that Billy ate the money," declared Uncle Dan when the excited ladies reported the matter to him.

"Nor I," agreed Grandma Popplehopper. "Strange dings vill a goat eat, but not money. Is it not so, Popper?"

"So I think meinself, Gretchen," said Grandpa Popplehopper, shaking his head. "In all the time we haf known Billy, his taste in food has been good, nor is he starving here. No, I do not think he touched the money."

"Nor the cake either!" cried Tiny Tim, almost sobbing with vexation. "It was a gooey chocolate cake, the lady said, and yet there is no chocolate on Billy's whiskers. I'm sure he didn't touch it, Uncle Dan."

"I don't think he did either, sonny," agreed Uncle Dan, "but appearances are against him." He pulled a bill from his pocket and handed it to the two excited women. "Here, ladies," he said, "this will cover your loss, though in giving you this I do not admit that Billy ate the money. But since he is staying here and you think that he did, I will pay the damages. Appearances may be against him this time, but I have yet to be convinced that Billy was the thief."

Nevertheless, Billy Whiskers' good reputation was absolutely ruined. Tiny Tim knew it, and Billy Whiskers knew it. He knew, too, that unless he caught the fellow who had run away with the

money, he would be forever regarded as a thief by Puddle Corners. He couldn't know that many weeks would pass before his innocence would be proven and he would once more be established as the hero, pet and playfellow of the good people in Happy Valley.

CHAPTER XIII

BILLY RECEIVES A DUCKING

THE next morning Billy Whiskers was lying beneath one of the big elm trees on Mr. Parker's lawn, more dejected and discouraged than he had been for many months, when Tiny Tim came racing home from the postoffice with a letter which he waved excitedly.

"Listen, Billy Whiskers!" he shouted. "Here's a letter for you, and a check for a hundred dollars! A hundred dollars! All for your very own! Think of it! Let me read the letter to you and then you can see for yourself! You lucky old goat! You just tumble into all kinds of good luck! Oh, Aunt Hetty, call Uncle Dan and the Popplehoppers. Billy Whiskers has received a check for a hundred dollars!"

In another minute everyone on Uncle Dan's farm had gathered around the bewildered old goat. They listened, completely flabbergasted, while Tiny Tim read the letter which had arrived addressed to Billy Whiskers, in care of Mr. Parker, Puddle Corners, New Hampshire.

"Dear Mr. Parker:

"We have been advised that one of our balloons, bearing the famous Billy Whiskers, came down in your yard in Puddle Corners. Since that is the farthest point reached by any of the balloons, the balloonist accompanying it is entitled to the first prize of one thousand dollars. But since Billy ran away with this balloon and prevented a disappointed young pilot from accompanying it, we think the largest share of the prize should go to the balloonist who should have been in the basket instead of Billy. At the same time we feel that the nation-wide publicity derived from the goat's exploit has been worth at least one hundred dollars. We are enclosing check for that amount. It will buy him a very fancy collar, or perhaps satisfy for once his nationally-known appetite."

"A hundred dollars!" gasped Aunt Hetty. "Let me look at the check, Tiny Tim."

"Von hundert dollars!" cried Grandma Popplehopper, unable to believe her ears.

"Unt for a goat!" added Grandpa Popplehopper, shaking his head in incredulous amazement.

"Well, it's a hundred dollar check all right!" declared Uncle Dan. "Made out to Billy Whiskers! Well, did you ever!"

"What shall we do with it?" asked Aunt Hetty. "If we give it to him, he'll eat it, likely as not."

"The idea!" scoffed Billy Whiskers. "I guess I know enough not to eat money—especially after yesterday. Give it to me, and I'll show you what I will do with it."

It happened that Uncle Dan was holding the check, turning it upside down and looking it over carefully, when a sudden gust of wind blew it out of his hand. Before any of the group could retrieve it, nimble Billy Whiskers had leaped forward and seized it in his mouth.

"He vill swallow it!" groaned Grandma Popplehopper, who had visions of a perfectly good hundred dollar check disappearing down Billy's throat. "He vill swallow it unt then it will be the end of it already yet!"

But Billy Whiskers did not swallow it. Instead, he marched over to Tiny Tim and laid the check at his feet, after which he looked up at the astonished boy in a way that said as plainly as words: "This check is for you. I want you to have it. You can buy me some candy once in a while and that will satisfy me."

"The check is for you, Tiny Tim!" gasped Aunt Hetty, rather tremulously, for the old goat's devotion was very touching.

"It is what he means, that is certain," agreed Uncle Dan, "and a very good solution to the problem too, if you should ask me," he added, beaming upon the delighted lad.

"A hundred dollars! All my own!" stammered Tiny Tim, quite

overcome by the gift. "Oh, Billy Whiskers! How can I ever, ever thank you! I'll buy five dollars' worth of candy bars, that's what I'll do, and then you can have one every day."

Tiny Tim kept his promise. When the check was cashed he bought a great box of candy bars and put them up in the top of Aunt Hetty's cupboard, and every day thereafter Billy Whiskers received at least one, and sometimes two of the luscious things.

A few days later Grandma and Grandpa Popplehopper bade the Parker family farewell and continued on their journey. There was much discussion as to whether or not they should take the big goat back as far as Pennsylvania, but the whole thing was finally decided by a wire from Mr. Watson in Wisconsin. He had read in the papers about Billy's exploit and asked the Parkers to keep him if possible until they could call for him later in the summer.

"Hooray!" shouted Tiny Tim, when he heard Uncle Dan read the telegram. "Now Billy can stay here all summer, can't he, Uncle Dan?"

"If he doesn't eat up all the cakes and silver in town," laughed Uncle Dan.

"How ridiculous!" fumed Billy Whiskers, who was smarting under the steady stream of gibes and jokes that were aimed at him from every side since the lawn party episode. "If I had only eaten their old cake, I wouldn't mind so much," he sputtered; "or if I could

only talk and tell them about the real thief! I wish I could find that fellow; I'd certainly get even with him for getting me into all this trouble."

Little did he know how soon he was to discover the thief's hiding-place.

Now there was one place that Billy found more interesting than any other: it was the old mill on the shore of the pond in which Tiny Tim and Teddy and all the other lads went swimming. The rickety old building and a few rotting bunkhouses were hidden in a little clearing behind the hill—perhaps a little more than half a mile from the village. Once used as a grist mill and later as a lumber mill, the rambling structure had been added to from time to time and covered a deal of ground. Inside were dismal rooms with creaking and broken floors, tumble-down stairways, and dangerous holes where heavy machinery had been removed. Nearly all the windows had long since been removed or broken. The old mill wheel that had been used in the early days reposed upon its side in the depths below, but the gates at the head of the mill race were still in working order. Whenever the boys wished to lower the water in the pond they opened the old gates and let the flood go pouring through.

"Hm," thought Billy Whiskers one day, as he watched the torrent go rushing through the narrow slimy old channel. "I'd hate to be in there."

Billy Whiskers, Stowaway

One afternoon when the boys were swimming and playing around the pond and mill, Ricky Phillips conceived an idea which was destined to make a bitter enemy of the good-natured old goat who was browsing contentedly in the old logging road beside the mill pond.

"Let's get Billy Whiskers over here and give him a ride down the runway," Ricky suggested.

The old runway, up which logs used to be pulled, was used by the boys as a sort of shoot-the-chutes and they spent hours sliding down over its slippery surface in all sorts of improvised contraptions, landing in the water below with shouts and shrieks of laughter.

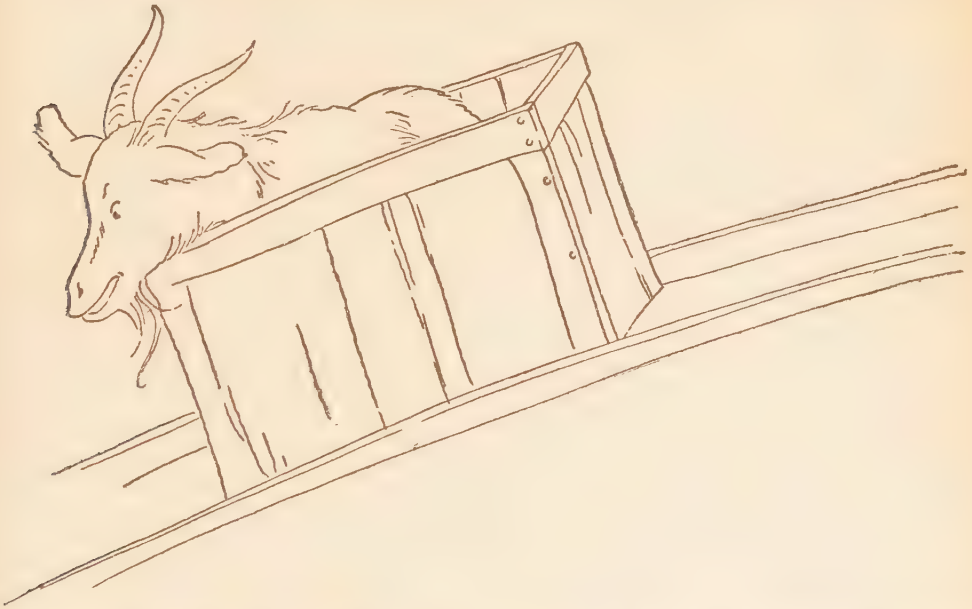
"Can he swim?" asked one of Billy's friends cautiously.

"Of course he can swim," declared Ricky. "Don't you remember how he swam in Salt Lake that time he jumped off the railroad track?"

"We'll put him in a box and then push it down the runway," cried Tommy Haines enthusiastically. "It'll be great fun to see him hit the water."

So that is exactly what they did. Tiny Tim was swimming in another part of the pond and did not see what was going on until too late. In the meantime Billy good-naturedly came when he was called and unhesitatingly stepped into the box in which Ricky had put a piece of candy. Then, without warning, the boys pushed the box

and its occupant over the edge of the runway before Billy dreamed that they were up to any particular mischief. In another minute he was slipping rapidly down the steep incline in the big box. Before



the amazed goat could leap off, it had struck the water with a splash, plunging Billy headfirst into the pond. In a moment more he was swimming toward the shore, angrier than he had been for many months.

Tiny Tim saw what had happened, and hurried across the pond; but before he arrived at the old mill Billy had clambered up on shore and trotted off around the old sawdust pile. Ricky and Tommy

and some of the others came running out on the old trestle in the rear and laughed and shouted as the bedraggled goat passed by.

"I'll get even with you smarties!" Billy thought stormily, glancing up at his youthful tormentors. "I'll—" He suddenly halted in his tracks, for his glance had fallen on one of the old windows in the upper part of the mill, and there, peering out to see what all the excitement was about, was the unkempt, evil face of the tramp who had stolen the cake and money at the church fair!

CHAPTER XIV

AN EVENTFUL WEEK

IF Billy Whiskers could only have talked, most of the excitement which kept Puddle Corners turned upside down for the next month would have been stopped right then and there. If Billy Whiskers could only have gone to the boys and said, "The man who took the cake and money is in the mill," his own reputation would have been instantly cleared and many people would have been saved a lot of trouble.

The next day was rainy and Uncle Dan and Tiny Tim went fishing, leaving Billy Whiskers unfastened in the barn. The big door was not quite closed, and it was only a matter of a few moments before the clever goat had pushed it open wide enough so that he could slip through. A moment later he was hurrying down the village street, hoping that Aunt Hetty hadn't heard the door squeak or noticed his departure.

Little Faith Bishop, one of Billy's new friends, was lying out on the porch in her big hammock, for the day was warm and sultry, and it was pleasant to hear the rain dripping off the vines and roof. When she saw Billy proceeding solemnly down the sidewalk she

called to him and he walked gravely up the porch steps to her side.

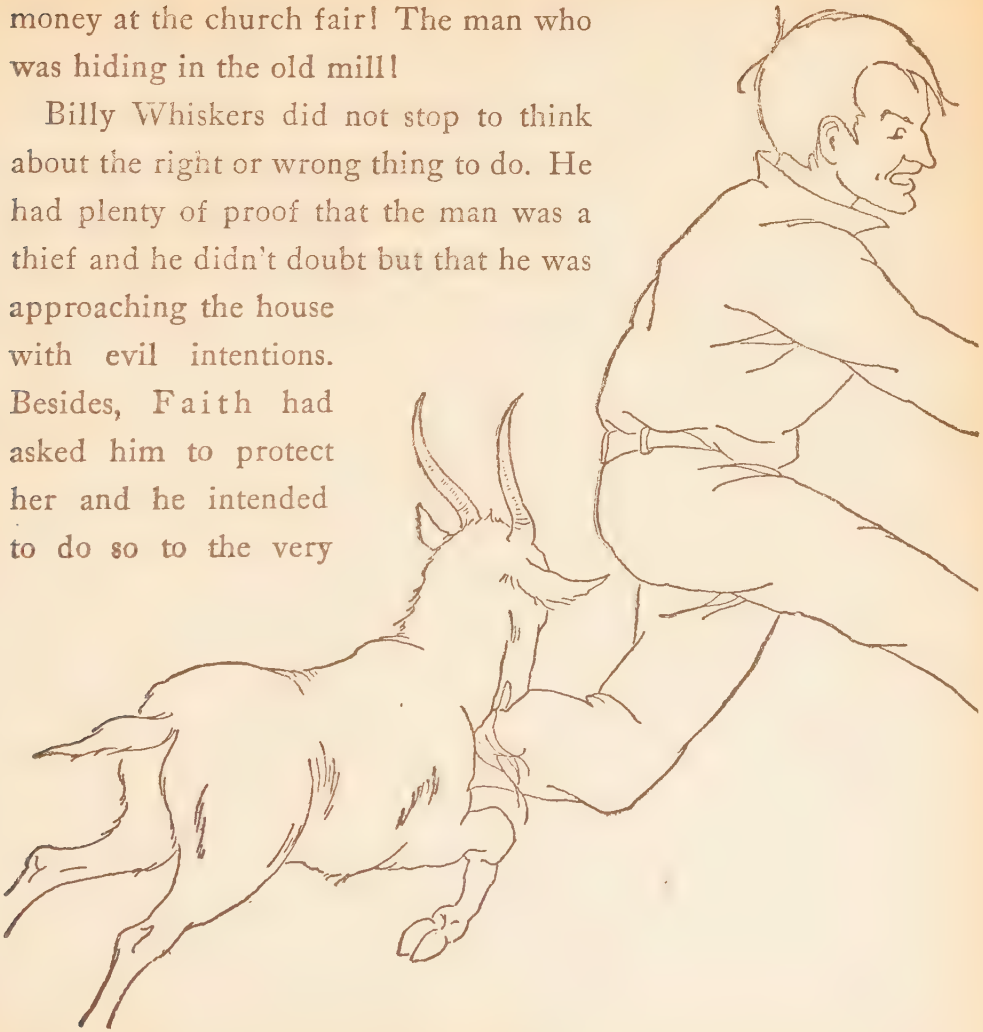
"Oh, you solemn old thing!" laughed Faith, patting the old goat and tweaking his whiskers just the least little bit. "You look as if you were wiser than King Solomon ever was. I wish you could tell me about all the strange places you have been, Billy," she went on, taking a cookie from a small box beside her and feeding it slowly to the grateful goat. "How interesting it would be! You've been 'most everywhere, haven't you, and seen many astounding things? I have been reading all the books about you that are in the library and I almost wish that I were a goat myself. Oh, look! There comes an evil-looking fellow up the walk, Billy, and there is no one at home. Mother just stepped over to Mrs. Price's. If he is cross or mean, you will take care of me, won't you, Billy?" she whispered, peering out through the vines.

The Bishop house sat off the road and rather by itself in a group of trees, so that there was no one who lived close by, though there were neighbors within shouting distance. Perhaps the visitor had seen Faith's mother leave the place and thought that there was no one at home, for the vines were thick over the porch and he couldn't easily see the hammock in which Faith was lying.

Anyhow, he walked warily up the path, not dreaming of the reception that he was to receive at the top of the steps. Billy Whiskers recognized the intruder just as soon as he looked out through the

vines. It was the man who had stolen the money at the church fair! The man who was hiding in the old mill!

Billy Whiskers did not stop to think about the right or wrong thing to do. He had plenty of proof that the man was a thief and he didn't doubt but that he was approaching the house with evil intentions. Besides, Faith had asked him to protect her and he intended to do so to the very



best of his ability. Then, too, he had a score to settle on his own account. So, just as the tramp reached the top of the steps, he was struck by a great white object with terrific force and sent sprawling upon the lawn. Over and over he rolled. At last he regained his feet and looked up, only to see a big white goat lunging toward him again, his head down and anger showing in every line of his body. The terrified man did not wait for the second attack. Down the walk he ran and on up the street, nor did he once look back as long as he was in sight.

"Good work, Billy Whiskers!" cried Faith delightedly. "Perhaps the man was all right; perhaps he really meant no harm and did want something, but I'm glad you acted just as you did, right here where I could see you. Now I shall always believe all those astonishing things in the stories about you."

After this episode, of which Faith made a great deal in the telling, Billy Whiskers was once more established as a sort of hero in Happy Valley and the church fair escapade was thrown into the background for the time being.

The very next night *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came to town and erected its tents on the meadow in front of the schoolhouse. It was a cheap little show and the dilapidated creaking wagons were drawn by decrepit tired-looking horses. But the children at Puddle Corners cared nothing about that. They had been reading the gaudy posters

for many days and were wildly eager to see little Eva and Simon Legree and Topsy and Uncle Tom and all the rest. The famous old show had been the most common topic of conversation among the children for many days, and Billy Whiskers was just as interested as they were when at last the wagons creaked into town and the tents began to go up across the river.

That evening all of the children in town who could beg or earn the price of admission thronged to the ticket window of the tawdry little show. Tiny Tim went with Teddy and the other boys, but Billy Whiskers was left at home, wondering how he could manage to get into the show without his master, for that was exactly what he intended to do. If *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was as exciting as the boys deemed it to be, it was certainly something that shouldn't be missed.

So, just as soon as possible after Tiny Tim and Teddy had departed, Billy carefully opened the barn door and stole out of the yard. A few minutes later he was cautiously approaching the lighted tents, hoping that he would not be noticed by Tiny Tim or any of his friends.

From a place of concealment behind a big packing box Billy watched the crowd file slowly into the tent. When at last there were only a few stragglers left, he hurried out and tried to pass the ticket window, but luck was not with him and he was indignantly shooed back by a member of the company.

"Just the same, I'll get in somehow even if I have to chew a hole in the tent," the angry goat decided, and that, in the end, was exactly what he was forced to do. For when at last he realized that there was no chance of passing the ticket window, he wandered around to the back of the tent and began to chew slowly at the old canvas. Almost instantly a hole appeared, and it was very easy to make it larger and larger until it was big enough to admit his whole body.

By this time it was very dark, and the show had been progressing for some time, greatly to Billy's dismay. Still, he hadn't dared to make a hole in the canvas until it was too dark for him to be noticed. When he finally did enter, Eliza was just ready to cross the river on the floating cakes of ice—painted blocks of wood drawn across the stage upon a piece of canvas—and as she leaped across, a big bloodhound bounded through the wings and started in pursuit. About halfway across the stage, however, he suddenly stopped and lay down upon the canvas which was moving slowly along.

The audience was shouting and roaring with laughter when Billy climbed in through the hole in the canvas and made his way quickly toward the noise in front. For a moment no one noticed him, then one of the helpers tried to shoo him outside, whereupon Billy promptly butted him down and leaped upon the stage just behind the wings.

A second later, to the intense amazement of Tiny Tim and the

rest of the spectators, Billy Whiskers bounded out on the ice behind Eliza who stood there waiting while Simon Legree tried to coax the hound into renewed activity. At the sight of the big white goat, Eliza fled shrieking from the stage and the tent rocked with wild hurrahs as the townspeople recognized the famous animal.

Billy Whiskers, however, was so surprised to find himself facing an audience that for a moment he stood perfectly still upon a cake of ice in the center of the stage. Then, catching sight of Tiny Tim and Barbara and Teddy who were sitting in the front row, he felt the old urge to show off once more, and astonished them all by standing up on his hind legs and bowing solemnly three times! After which, well satisfied with the applause that followed, the clever old goat leaped off the stage and ran to Tiny Tim, who made a place for his pet on the ground beside him, from which point of vantage Billy witnessed the rest of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

CHAPTER XV

AT THE PICNIC

THE next afternoon there was a picnic in the big pine grove on the hill across the river. It was the annual Grange picnic, a much anticipated event, and crowds of people came to it from all the neighboring towns. Everybody in Puddle Corners was there, Billy decided, as he entered the grove between Teddy and Tiny Tim.

The pasture was full of cars and wagons. Horses were unhitched and tied to trees and fences. Children were racing about, playing games. Women were busy unpacking boxes of sandwiches and cutting pies and cakes and pickles and piling them on plates and platters which were ranged up and down the long tables. Such cakes! Brown and white and cocoanut and orange icings! Plates piled high with cookies and sandwiches! Glasses of jam and jelly and mustard pickle! Big pots of steaming baked beans and loaves of brown bread!

"Really, I never before saw so many good things to eat all in one place," Billy Whiskers decided, hanging back when Tiny Tim urged him away from the tempting tables. "And freezers of ice cream, too, and milk cans full of milk and lemonade. What a time these

youngsters will have! And what a time *I* would have if I could only help myself. Yum! I wish Nannie could see all these good things."

Tiny Tim, however, fearful of what might happen if Billy were left near the edibles, coaxed him away to a spot where most of the children were gathered.

"Here comes Tiny Tim and Billy Whiskers!" they shouted as soon as they glimpsed the two. "Let's see if the old goat will do some of his famous stunts!"

A moment later Billy was the center of an excited and admiring group of young people, many of whom had read of his adventures and thought him the most marvelous animal in the world. Under such circumstances Billy was always at his clever best. He liked young people anyway—especially when they were nice jolly children like these—and alas, if you have read of his many adventures, you will know that he loved to show off. So he allowed them all to pet him and pull his whiskers and even carried the smaller tots around on his back while he gobbled up sundry tidbits that suddenly appeared from pockets and paper bags, the while he tried to think of something to do—some stunt, that is—that would prove him to be as clever as they all seemed to think.

"Do something clever, Billy," Tiny Tim whispered in his ear. "Do, that's a good fellow!"

"Dear me," worried Billy, endeavoring to think of something

that would please Tiny Tim, "what shall I do, anyway? I can't think of any trick I can do without Button and Stubby. How I wish they were here! I can drop the handkerchief," he thought as he spied a handkerchief in a little girl's hand.

He stepped up, took the little pink square from her hand gently so as not to frighten her, then dropped it at the feet of another little girl and ran away.

"He wants to play drop-the-handkerchief!" shouted Tiny Tim gleefully. "He said so just as plain as anything!"

In another minute the children had formed a big circle and Billy was given the handkerchief, with which he started solemnly around the ring. How the children did laugh as he trotted around the big circle before he could decide where to drop it! Then he chose a tiny girl who he thought could not catch him, and away he ran. She didn't overtake him either, and Billy ran into her place and stood there amid shouts of applause until the next boy threw the handkerchief in front of the wise goat's nose.

"Catch him, Billy! Catch him!" shouted the other children, and

Billy did catch him, butting him gently to the ground before he could stop.

At last the picnic dinner was served and Billy was stuffed with all sorts of delicious goodies. He was munching a big piece of apple pie which Tiny Tim had taken but did not want, when he saw something that made him forget the pie, good as it was.

It was the tramp, freshly shaven and more respectably dressed than was his custom. He was slyly extracting a purse from the pocket of a man in the crowd in front of the speaker's platform.

With Billy Whiskers to think was to act. Before Tiny Tim could stop him, he had cleared the table with a single leap and plunged toward the tramp, who didn't see his enemy coming. Down he went beneath Billy's wild onslaught! People screamed. The tramp shouted angrily. Pandemonium reigned for a minute or two. The speaker stopped and Uncle Dan hurried through the crowd and grasped Billy tightly by the collar.

"What *ever* made you do a thing like that, Billy?" he cried as the tramp picked himself up, put on a bold front, and demanded to know who was the owner of that savage goat. Really, though, he was terrified, for the stolen purse was in his pocket and he wasn't sure that he had not been seen. Still, he played his part well, muttered threats of damages and lawsuits, and slouched quickly out of the picnic grove.

No one, not even his best friends, could understand why Billy should have attacked a stranger as he did, for nobody recognized the tramp, as Faith Bishop would have done had she only been at the picnic. So the disgusted goat was led from the picnic grounds in disgrace. Later on in the afternoon, however, the stolen purse was missed. Then the owner recalled that the tramp was standing right beside him when Billy attacked. He concluded that he was the thief and that Billy Whiskers had done his best to apprehend him.

"I'm getting into more trouble every day of my life," Billy mourned as he lay on the lawn and listened to the sounds of jollification on the hill across the river. "I've never in my life had so much ill luck as I have had at Puddle Corners, where I'm on my very best behavior. And that tramp is to blame for it all! Well, there's one thing certain. I'm going to bring that fellow to justice or my name's not Billy Whiskers!"

CHAPTER XVI

AT BARBARA'S PARTY

THE following week was a most uneventful one for Billy Whiskers but he enjoyed it nevertheless, for the news of his attack on the pickpocket had become common gossip as such things will in a small town, and people suddenly became very friendly again.

During that entire week the tramp remained in hiding. It was well for him that he did, for the whole valley was aroused and on the lookout for a tall dark stranger. The most aggravating part of it to Billy was that he was forced to listen to Tiny Tim and Teddy and Barbara discussing the mysterious tramp with the knowledge that he could have cleared up the whole affair in short order if it had been possible for him to tell the children of his discovery at the old mill. As it was, the secret remained locked in his wise old head and the tramp continued to enjoy his hiding-place for a while longer.

The summer days passed pleasantly enough for Billy Whiskers in spite of the lack of any special excitement. Uncle Dan was haying and Billy tagged along behind the rake or hayrack, eating his fill of the fragrant clover. Once he convulsed the haymakers by climbing

upon the hayrake which was standing still while the men pitched on a load of hay. The old horse, thinking that it was one of the men, started off with Billy sitting solemnly on the seat. The men called to Barbara who came running with her kodak and caught the old goat in one of the funniest poses of his life.

The picture was sent to the newspapers and was reprinted all over the United States with the caption: *Famous Goat Makes Hay While the Sun Shines.* The Watsons, of course, saw the picture. One of the grandchildren showed it to Nannie, and she was greatly relieved to know that her uneasy spouse was still at the Parker farm.

Then one evening Billy had a chance to get even with Ricky Phillips and Tommy Haines, who had sent him flying on that wild ride down the old log slip into the water. He had avoided those particular boys ever since, and had been very cross and cantankerous whenever they were around.

It happened that Barbara Bean gave a party one evening and did not invite Tommy or Ricky. Barbara always gave the most delightful parties with plenty of good things to eat and lots of prizes, and both Ricky and Tommy were piqued and angry because they had not been asked. As a result, they planned to put a damper on the party.

It was dusk and the children were playing games on the lawn in front of the house when the two boys stole down through the back field and hid behind the big barn. After ascertaining that the coast

was clear, they stole through the barn and entered the narrow passageway between the two buildings. In New Hampshire, you see, the barns and houses adjoin each other on account of the extreme cold and deep snows in the winter.

Unluckily for them, Billy Whiskers had come to the party with Tiny Tim and was poking his head into the grain box when he saw the two boys stealing through the passageway into the kitchen.

"Those rascals are up to some kind of mischief," he thought. "I heard Barbara say that they were not invited to the party. I'll just follow and see what they are up to."

Now Ricky and Tommy knew very well that there would be ice cream at Barbara's party. They knew, too, that it was the custom at Puddle Corners to freeze the ice cream early in the afternoon and let it stand packed in ice in the woodshed until time to serve it. They were right in their conclusions, too, for there stood the big freezer in the shed just outside the kitchen door where any brine that escaped would do no harm. Mrs. Bean and another lady were busy in the kitchen, and nobody heard the two boys stealing through the passageway.

Billy Whiskers was filled with joy when he saw the trap into which the boys walked. For the door leading out of the shed was securely closed, there were people in the kitchen, and he himself blocked any escape through the passageway.

"Now I have them in a trap!" he chuckled. "I'll get even with them right now for that trick they played on me."

The boys grasped the handle of the freezer and started tiptoeing softly back through the dusky passageway, delighted that their plans had worked out so well.

Suddenly something white came rushing out of the darkness ahead, throwing them both to the floor and sending the freezer clattering to

the ground. When they scrambled to their feet and tried to run away, Billy was ready for them, and gently bunted them to the ground again.

Of course, Mrs. Bean and others came running out of the kitchen when they heard the racket and turned on the lights in the woodshed. There on the floor sat Ricky and Tommy, grinning sheepishly, while near them, standing guard over the freezer, stood Billy Whiskers.

CHAPTER XVII

BILLY IN THE BEAR PEN

THERE was another place at Puddle Corners in which Billy Whiskers was greatly interested. It was Silas Dusenberry's store at the lower end of the winding village street. Silas was a thrifty man who owned the village store. Overhead he had built a public hall, and beside it was a candy, pop and ice cream stand. But the greatest attraction of all was a big pen surrounded by a heavy iron fence in which Silas kept three fat black bears to attract the tourists to his store and candy stand.

Nancy and Sam and Jim were the names of the three animals, and three happy creatures they surely appeared to be in spite of their captivity. Inside, Silas had built a tall platform with steps leading to the top, and on this the bears loved to play and frolic like so many children. And, like children, they were exceedingly fond of sweets and soda water and would groan and grunt and whine and howl for the various goodies.

Billy Whiskers liked to stand outside the pen and watch the animals perform. It seemed very wonderful to him to have them securely inside where he could watch them in perfect safety; he had

never forgotten his encounter with the big grizzly in Yellowstone Park and had a healthy respect for all members of the bear family. He had learned at first hand just what a stroke from one of those powerful paws would do.

There was another reason why he spent as much time as possible at Silas'. He quickly found that he himself was almost as great an object of curiosity as were the bears and received a share of the goodies which were originally purchased for the noisy captives.

"I shall have to put you in the pen with the bears, Billy," laughed Silas one day as he watched Billy munching a huge stick of candy one of the visiting children had bought at the stand.

"I just wish he would put you in here, you greedy goat," growled Nancy, the big bear, standing up with her nose against the wire and eyeing Billy Whiskers angrily. "We would certainly make short work of you. What business have you around here eating our candy and things?"

"That's what I'd like to know," grumbled Sam, looking longingly through the wire.

"And I, too," whined Jim. "It isn't fair, Billy Whiskers! You're outside all the time anyway, and you must get plenty to eat at home, you're so fat. It's all the fun we have, eating these things the tourists give us. I wish you'd stay away."

"Well, well, I never thought of it that way, I'm sure," laughed

Billy, swallowing the last morsel of the candy. "I don't come down here so very often, you know, so I don't see how I can possibly spoil *much* of your fun."

Before he had finished speaking, a car of tourists stopped beside the bear pen and bought three bottles of soda for the bears. They gave one to Nancy and one to Sam and one to Jim, who seized them eagerly. Sitting down upon their haunches, they held the bottles to their lips, tipped back their heads, and drained them before one could say Jack Robinson.

"You can't do that, can you, Billy Whiskers?" taunted Sam, throwing down his bottle and shambling to the iron fence to beg for more.

"No, I can't," laughed Billy. "My hoofs don't make as good hands as your paws."

One of the ladies came up timidly to the big white goat with a candy bar in her hand.

Silas hurriedly reassured her. "Don't you be afraid, ma'am," he said. "That's the famous Billy Whiskers about whom so many books have been written. He's almost as clever as a human being. Just wait a minute, lady. Perhaps he will do some tricks for us."

"Perhaps he will," agreed Billy, eyeing the fat candy bar, and glancing over at the pen where the three bears were howling lustily. "I'll just show those bears a thing or two," he declared, determinedly,

and proceeded to stand up on his hind feet. This way and that he walked pompously; then he bowed to the lady who was holding out the candy bar, and dropped to all four feet again.

"Clever goat!" cried the lady, laughing, and placed the candy bar in Billy's mouth.

"Br-r-r-rh!" screamed Nancy, gnashing her teeth with rage.

"Oh-ee-e-e!" squealed the younger bears disappointedly, as they saw the candy bar disappear down Billy's throat, and others of the party press candy and pop corn upon the wise old goat.

After that even Silas noticed the animosity of the three bears toward Billy Whiskers. Whenever he appeared they would all rush to the side of the pen and growl angrily, and keep shuffling up and down the pen beside the wire just as long as he was near.

Unfortunately for Billy, the matter soon became town talk and Ricky Phillips and Tommy Haines learned of it. One day they fol-

lowed Billy down the street to see for themselves just what would happen when the goat approached the bear pen.

It happened that there were several other boys standing around the pen and it didn't take long for so many heads to hatch a pretty bit of mischief.

"Here's a dime," Ricky said, taking one out of his pocket. "It ought to be worth ten cents to see a good fight and you fellows can pay me a penny apiece and we'll be square. We'll buy a big candy bar and a nickel's worth of bear candy. Then some of you can get Billy to follow you to the door of the pen and some of you can coax the bears over to the other side with the loose candy. We will open the gate and the feller with the candy can step inside for a minute, get Billy to follow him, give him the bar and jump out again before the bears discover that Billy is inside."

It was no trick at all to entice the unsuspecting old goat to the pen with the candy bar for two very nice boys did the trick—two boys against whom Billy had no grudge whatever. Had it been Ricky or Tommy who led him on, he would have been suspicious, but as it was, he wandered innocently on behind the youngster, reaching every now and then for the candy bar which was, of course, kept just beyond his nose.

Billy was so intent upon the candy that he didn't notice where he was going, but when at last the boy had slipped it into his mouth and

he was munching it contentedly, he heard a clicking noise behind him and glanced around. To his horror, he was standing inside the pen and the door was shut tight behind him.

At that very moment Nancy looked around and dropped to her feet with a snarl. Sam and Jim quickly followed her, and in a moment more three angry bears were trotting rapidly across the pen, greatly to the delight of the boys who stood outside, their faces pressed close to the wire. The lads who had opened the gate had mingled with the crowd so that nobody knew just who was to blame for the goat's predicament.

"Well, well!" thought Billy Whiskers, quickly noting the lay of the land, "this is certainly no place for a goat! That was a mean trick, and I'll bet Ricky and Tommy were to blame. There they are just outside the wire and they are tickled to pieces. Here come the bears! *Three* of them! What shall I do anyway? I might be able to handle the big bear, or maybe both small bears, but not all three of them. Still, I'll do the best I can. I guess I'll have to, for they all hate me and will make short work of me."

Just before Nancy reached him, Billy rushed across the pen and struck her broadside. Down she went with a grunt and lay there for a minute before she could regain her breath. Quick as a flash Billy leaped back into his corner and sprang at Sam, who, with Jim, had hesitated to attack when he saw Nancy go down. What sort of a

fighter was this animal who bunted with his head like a mad thing?

Down went Sam under the angry goat's charge, rolling over and over across the pen. At that, poor Jim was utterly demoralized. He turned tail and fled, scrambling up to the very top of the tall platform from which he looked down whining pitifully.

By this time, Nancy had regained her feet, more angry and savage than ever. Perhaps it would have gone hard with the brave old goat if Silas hadn't come rushing into the pen, whip in hand, and driven Nancy into a corner where he snapped a heavy chain to the ring in her collar. Then Sam was sent scuttling up the steps to lie whimpering beside Jim, and in another minute the door of the pen was opened and Billy leaped outside, none the worse for the encounter.

"Bravo, Billy!" shouted all the boys, clustering around the old fellow and offering him sweets. "That was a real fight, just like the ones in your books. We really didn't think you could do it, old fellow!"

But Billy stalked away without so much as a glance at the offering and trotted quickly up the road to Uncle Dan's where Tiny Tim was anxiously watching for him. After that he seldom visited the bear pen, and when he did, he kept well away from the gate through which he had so innocently walked into trouble.

CHAPTER XVIII

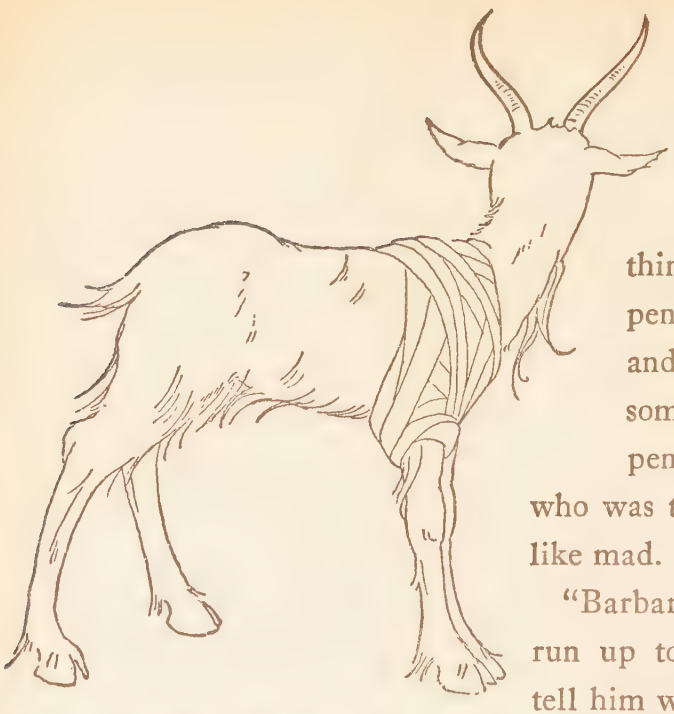
A SHOT IN THE DARK

ONE evening there was a poverty party in the school hall which Billy Whiskers attended and enjoyed immensely. Tiny Tim, assisted by Barbara and Teddy, had dressed the old goat in a pair of ragged overalls and a big straw hat, with a red handkerchief around his neck and spectacles upon his nose. To their great satisfaction he received the prize for the funniest costume.

The party was not yet over when the happy children left and trudged slowly up the village street. As they crossed the bridge in front of Aunt Mercy Priest's, they were startled by a shriek from her darkened house. Then a series of shrieks! Then a door banged and someone came running out into the yard and dashed up the street!

The moon was shining so brightly that Billy Whiskers recognized the tramp instantly and bounded away in pursuit before the frightened children could stop him. Aunt Mercy's screams continued and in an incredibly short time an excited crowd gathered at the little house, all endeavoring to find out just what had happened.

For a moment the children were in a quandary. They were badly



frightened, and they didn't know what course to pursue. They were afraid something terrible had happened to Aunt Mercy, and equally afraid that something would happen to Billy Whiskers who was tearing up the road like mad.

"Barbara, you and Teddy run up to Uncle Dan's and tell him what has happened," Tiny Tim said at last, "and I will run after Billy Whiskers."

Billy, in the meantime, steadily gained on the fleeing tramp who heard the big goat pattering along behind and turned around angrily. It was the same white goat that had nearly been his undoing before!

"I'll get you now!" he shouted and aimed a revolver at the unsuspecting animal. He pulled the trigger, and the bullet tore through Billy's shoulder. The goat fell to the ground and had to lie and watch the tramp go running down the hillside, ford the river, and

disappear in the forest on the opposite bank. A minute later Tiny Tim rushed up and found Billy almost unconscious.

"Oh, he's dead! Billy is dead!" Tiny Tim sobbed, as Uncle Dan and others came running up. "The thief shot him!"

"He's not dead, son," Uncle Dan comforted, turning a flashlight upon the prostrate goat. "The bullet went right through his shoulder and came out the other side. I don't think it will prove serious. Brave old fellow! He must have nearly caught his man, or the fellow wouldn't have risked a shot."

"Come on, let's find the thief," shouted one of the men. "Remember, he's made off with all of Aunt Mercy's money and he'll get away with it if we don't hurry."

But search as they would, no trace of the thief could they find for Tiny Tim had been too alarmed about Billy to notice that he had crossed the river and gone up through the woods in the direction of the old mill.

"I might have known that something would have happened to spoil such a perfect evening," groaned Billy as they carried him back to Uncle Dan's. "Dear me, dear me! My shoulder hurts dreadfully. I wish Nannie were here. It would help a lot if she could only stand near me and put her head upon my shoulder."

Poor old Billy! For a few days he was sore and badly crippled, and the most disconsolate animal imaginable.

"He looks as if he had lost his very best friend," laughed Aunt Hetty, placing a plateful of stale sugared doughnuts in front of his nose. "I never saw such a mournful-looking creature—never!"

Billy *felt* mournful too. His shoulder was so sore and stiff that he lay quietly upon the lawn most of the time, watching the admiring throng that came to Uncle Dan's place to visit him. Every child in town, and many of the grown-ups, brought tempting things for Billy to eat, so that he *did* eat, in spite of the fact that he seemed to have no appetite, and he grew fatter each day as he lay there and lunched on the proffered goodies.

From his visitors Billy learned that the thief had never been caught and that Aunt Mercy's savings had disappeared when the tramp stole the stocking full of money which she kept in an old soapstone stove in the parlor. A stocking full of money! Many hundreds of hard-earned dollars! And though everybody suspected the tramp who had been prowling around for weeks, nobody could find a trace of him and nobody thought of looking in the old mill.

"Oh, dear!" groaned the helpless goat. "If I could only talk, I could tell them all about it and maybe they would find the money." Never in his life had he so bemoaned his inability to speak. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to coax Tiny Tim and the others up to the old mill just as soon as he could hobble around again.

On the third day of his convalescence a big green car drove into

the Parker yard with a strangely familiar toot. Billy staggered quickly to his feet. Where had he heard that horn before? And seen that car?

It was the MacGregors! Joan and Margie and Gene were all peering anxiously out of the windows, waving and shouting wildly. As soon as the car stopped they came tearing across the lawn and covered the astounded goat with caresses.

"We read all about you, Billy!" Margie cried. "We could hardly wait until daddy could bring us to see you."

Billy Whiskers was so happy that he actually laughed, as Tiny Tim said afterward. Never in his life had he enjoyed any trip as much as he did the one that he spent with the kind-hearted jolly MacGregors. Never had he known three children who were as kind and considerate as the MacGregor children. No wonder he was happy! You must remember it was his desire to see this particular family again that had caused him to become a stowaway on the flat car back in Wisconsin. And here they were, all of them, the same happy family that he had known a year ago!

Gene had grown taller, to be sure, but he was still the same happy, laughing lad and his pockets were fairly bursting with goodies for his beloved friend. Margie put her arms around Billy's neck and told him over and over again how delighted she was to see him. Joan pounded his sides and climbed upon his back. Whereupon Billy

stumbled bravely to his feet and staggered slowly around the yard as long as he could bear the pain in his sore shoulder.

"Do come to our town and visit us before you go back, Billy," Gene urged. He always talked to the big goat as if he could understand everything. "We want to show you off, old fellow. Everybody has heard so much about you since we returned from the Yellowstone."

"I wish I could," thought Billy, "but I don't suppose it will be possible."

By the time the MacGregors had heard all about Billy's latest exploits and were ready to start for home, Billy was so full of food that he was uncomfortable in any position. But as the big green car pulled slowly out of the yard with all three MacGregor children leaning out of the windows and shouting good-bye, Billy raised one foot and waved it solemnly, just as he used to do on the trip out West.

CHAPTER XIX

SEVERAL OLD FRIENDS

ON THE fifth day after the robbery Billy was nearly as lively and well as usual. He limped slightly, to be sure, but that was only to be expected, for his shoulder was still sore, but he had fully regained his appetite and would even eat grass when there was nothing better forthcoming.

That afternoon Uncle Dan came home with some interesting news.

"Here's a telegram for Billy Whiskers," he said with mock solemnity as he handed a yellow telegram to Tiny Tim. "You'd better read it first. It may be something important."

"A telegram for Billy Whiskers!" stuttered Tiny Tim, incredulously. "Who could have sent him a telegram?"

"Read it and you'll find out," advised Uncle Dan, laughing.

So Tiny Tim took the message out of the envelope and read excitedly:

Billy Whiskers,

At Uncle Dan Parker's, Puddle Corners, N. H.

Have read about your accident. Hope you are feeling better. I wish I were there to cheer you up. Mr. Watson says that he will soon

go east to bring you home again and I shall be so glad. You may see Button and Stubby any day now. They have disappeared. Bushels of love from your devoted cream puff,

Nannie.

Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

"Oh, oh!" shouted Tiny Tim, "isn't that the best ever! What a jolly man Mr. Watson must be! I'll go and read it to Billy Whiskers and see what he does."

"Telegram for you, old fellow!" he shouted, racing over to the goat who was lying behind the lilac bush. "Come here quickly!" he cried as he saw Barbara and Teddy coming toward the house. "Here's a telegram for Billy Whiskers!"

"A telegram!" thought Billy, astonished. "Well, if this isn't a world of wonders! Who would be sending *me* a telegram, I should like to know?"

"Listen, Billy," laughed Tiny Tim. "I'll bet this is the most expensive telegram you ever received." Then he read the message to the wide-eyed goat and the other delighted listeners, and when he had finished, Billy was so excited he did his very best to stand on his head. It was positively the only thing that would adequately express his appreciation. Then he reached for the message, and before anyone could retrieve it he had chewed it up and swallowed it with an air of great satisfaction, as much as to say: "Well, it was *my* telegram.

I guess I had a right to eat it if I wanted to. It was the only place I had to put it," after which the children ran to tell Uncle Dan and Aunt Hetty about it.

"A telegram from Nannie!" mused Billy, lying down again and staring dreamily at the distant mountains. "Well, well, well! I wish she were here, the dear little cream puff, if only to share some of the good things to eat here at Puddle Corners. So Button and Stubby are off on a trip, too! Well, well! I suppose they started out to look for me. Perhaps they will happen along here one of these days. I wouldn't be a bit surprised. They have always found me so far, the dear little rascals!"

A few days later Tiny Tim, Barbara, and Teddy went raspberrying. Billy Whiskers decided to go along. Not that he cared for berries, but he did enjoy going to strange new places, and he had never yet been up into the wood lot where the raspberries grew in the rotting underbrush.

Once there, however, he found the place much too rough underfoot for his sore shoulder, and while the children sought out the very reddest patch of berries, he wandered slowly through the cool shadowy forest.

It was a beautiful forest. Billy thought he had never seen moss so thick as it was here under the big spruces. Not a sound did the big goat make as he plodded slowly along on the soft green carpet.

Partridges heard him, though, and whirred away through the trees; a hedgehog, too, stopped gnawing the bark off a young pine and looked inquiringly at the intruder; rabbits went scampering across his path, and at last a pretty doe leaped out of the bushes and stood facing him in astonishment.

"What fun it is here in the forest!" Billy declared. "I think I shall come here often. I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much."

Before long he entered an old wood road which led out into the main highway on top of the hill. From this point Billy could look out over Happy Valley and see the river winding down through Puddle Corners.

"Well, I guess I won't try to go back to the berry field," he decided. "There's the village right down there and I don't think I could ever find the children again to save my life. I haven't the slightest idea where the berry patch is."

It was lucky he made this decision. He was about halfway to town and just about opposite the old mill, when a dog and cat came bounding down from a high bank beside the road.

"Billy Whiskers! Billy Whiskers!" Stubby shouted, wildly.

"Billy Whiskers! Look who's here!" Button called shrilly.

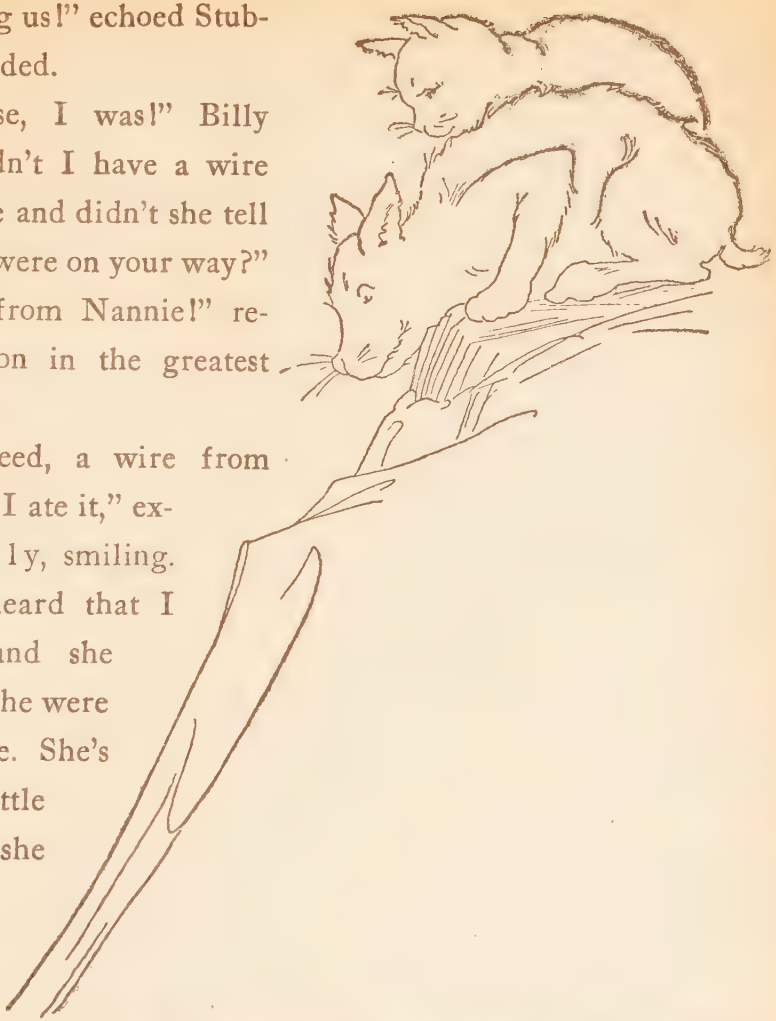
"I was expecting you, you rascals!" laughed Billy, not half as astonished as his two pals thought he would be.

"Expecting us!" echoed Stubby, dumfounded.

"Of course, I was!" Billy teased. "Didn't I have a wire from Nannie and didn't she tell me that you were on your way?"

"A wire from Nannie!" repeated Button in the greatest amazement.

"Yes, indeed, a wire from Nannie, and I ate it," explained Billy, smiling. "She had heard that I was hurt and she wished that she were here with me. She's a good little wife! Then she also told me that you two had left the farm and had already been gone several days. And your Uncle Billy knew what that meant."



"That we had started out to look for you," laughed Stubby.

"Exactly," agreed Billy Whiskers. "Now let's find a nice shady spot and rest while you tell me all about your trip."

"Well, let's see," Stubby began, as soon as the three Chums were comfortably settled in the shade of a big maple tree. "I hardly know how to begin. We knew you were in New Hampshire, of course, for the papers out west were full of the balloon exploit. Then there was the message from Black Wings before that, and the picture of you on the hayrake later on. Oh, yes, we heard enough about you, Billy. You're too famous to drop out of sight."

"But we began to want to wander, too, when we heard what a fine time you were having," Button went on, taking up the story. "So we watched until a New Hampshire car came along going east, and then we hid in back, just like we did before. The people turned out to be very kind, and brought us along, intending to take us home with them. But today when we stopped down at the bear pen, we heard someone telling about Billy Whiskers and his fight with the bears there, and knew that we must be in Puddle Corners. We jumped out of the car and ran away but we couldn't find you anywhere."

"We were just going to find a nice comfortable spot to spend the night and start hunting again in the morning," Stubby explained. "We knew it was only a question of time before you would pop up somewhere."

"Now tell us about *your* trip and adventures," Button begged eagerly. "You always have such interesting experiences, Billy, that I can hardly wait to hear about them."

"Before I start, tell me about Nannie," Billy demanded. "Was she well and happy when you left?"

"Quite well," Button replied, "but a little quiet and worried as she always is when you are away. She doesn't say much, but we know she misses you terribly, Billy."

"I guess she does," Billy replied soberly. "Dear me, I really should never go away and leave her, but the inclination always comes all of a sudden, and I go before I realize what I'm doing."

Then he started in to tell of his own adventures, from the day he leaped upon the flat car to the night of the robbery.

"And where is this old mill?" demanded Stubby eagerly, as Billy finished his tale.

"Is it far away?" queried Button excitedly.

"Right over among those trees," Billy replied. "It won't take us five minutes to get there."

"Then let's go at once!" Stubby begged. "I want to look the place over."

"So do I," agreed Button. "Remember, fellows, I can climb into places that neither of you could ever reach. Maybe I can find the money."

"Maybe you can," exclaimed Billy Whiskers. "In fact, I see no reason why you shouldn't do that very thing. I always did wish that you and Stubby were here. We'd have had this mystery cleared up long ago. Come on, let's go over there right now."

With that the three Chums were off, and a few minutes later they were approaching the old mill, taking good care to make no noise and to keep out of sight as much as possible.

CHAPTER XX

AT THE BURNING MILL

DARKNESS was falling as they drew near the clearing for the three excited animals had talked for hours. As they reached the last fringe of shrubbery, a pink glow began to light the sky ahead and the sound of crackling, burning timbers reached their ears.

"Fire!" groaned Billy, dashing forward. "Oh, dear, if the money is hidden in the mill, it will either burn or the tramp will get away with it."

"Not if we can stop him!" Stubby declared, racing along by Billy's side.

"Perhaps we can do something yet," Button mewed encouragingly.

By the time the three animals arrived at the mill townspeople were already hurrying up the old logging road in cars and wagons, for a fire was a most unusual spectacle in Happy Valley and everybody rushed up to the conflagration.

On this occasion no attempt was made to put out the fire for everybody was glad enough to see the ramshackle building go.

"The fire is in the front of the mill," Billy panted, as the three pals

raced up to the building, "and the tramp lives up there where that window is in the back. If he is in the mill, he will try to get away, of course. If he is outside and sees the fire, he will try to get back in for the money—if it is there. We must watch behind the mill. It is dark back there. If the tramp shows up, it will be where he can keep out of sight as much as possible."

Accordingly, the Chums hurried out behind the mill and found a hiding-place behind a clump of bushes on the bank of the brook, from which point of vantage they could see anyone who was approaching the mill.

"I can hear something," Stubby whispered, after a moment. "Somebody is walking up the brook."

"I can see somebody," Button added.

"It's the tramp!" Billy declared, greatly relieved. "Now don't make a noise. He is going toward the mill and that means that the money must be inside. We must let him get it or we will never find it. You fellows stay here and watch and I will follow him into the mill."

"Let me go, Billy," Button begged. "I can go quieter than you can."

"Let me go!" Stubby insisted. "I can nip his leg and make him drop the money."

"It might be so heavy that you couldn't carry it," Billy protested. "Besides, I'm the biggest. I will go myself. I can butt him to the

ground if need be and dash away with the stocking of money."

"But suppose it isn't in a stocking," Button suggested. "He might have taken it out long ago."

"I don't know," Billy replied, shaking his head. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Let us *all* go," Stubby proposed. "Three are better than one any time. I can bite and Button can scratch, and between the three of us we ought to get the money away from the tramp."

"I guess you're right," Billy agreed. "Come on. He's just slipping under the mill."

A minute later three eager animals were hurrying cautiously along among the rotting timbers and pools of stagnant water beneath the mill. Above them they could hear the roar of the flames and the crash of falling timbers. As they advanced, the air grew hotter and hotter and the smoke more dense and suffocating.

"I can't see a thing," Billy declared, stopping at last. "Can you, Button?"

"Not much," Button admitted ruefully.

"Neither can I," panted Stubby, who found it very hard to breathe. "My eyes smart horribly, but my ears are still good. The tramp has stopped. He is smashing something. Now he is coming back on the run. Let's get out of the smoke and wait for him. We couldn't find the stocking if he did drop it here."

"Right you are," agreed Billy, and scampered hastily back to the fresh air, followed closely by his faithful companions.

As soon as they were once more outside, they paused and listened intently.

"He's coming!" Stubby informed the others. "He's stumbling over things. I guess the smoke was too much for him. He's almost here! Billy, you butt him down just as soon as he appears and Button and I will do all we can. Here he comes!"

At that moment the tramp staggered out of the smoke and stood leaning against a timber for a moment while he breathed deeply of the fresh air. Then he peered cautiously out from under the mill to see if anybody was in sight.

"He has the stocking!" Button whispered. "I can see it in his hand!"

"Good!" Billy exclaimed with satisfaction, likewise in a whisper. "Now we will get it!"

Now Uncle Dan had brought Tiny Tim and all of his friends he could bundle into the car, up to the old mill to view the fire. As they walked around the building watching the flames, he observed that the old wooden gate at the head of the dam was almost burned through and he quickly led the children out behind the mill where the pent-up waters of the pond would soon be rushing by.

Just as they arrived, the back of the mill caught and flared up

brightly, disclosing a most amazing scene. Billy Whiskers was butting the tramp to the ground and Button and Stubby were rushing up to complete his discomfiture.

"It's Billy Whiskers!" Tiny Tim shouted frantically. "And look at the strange dog and cat! Where did *they* come from?"

"It looks just like Stubby and Button—the ones in the book!" shouted Barbara in astonishment.

"It certainly does," agreed Tiny Tim, unbelievingly. "They were always doing something like this in the stories. Oh, look! Look at them now!"

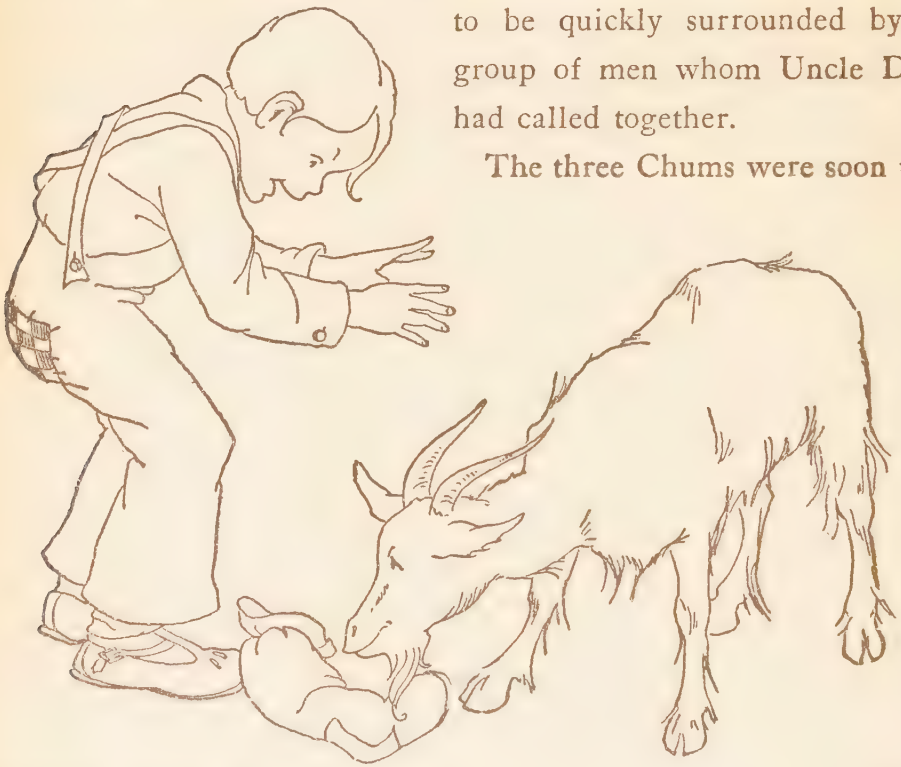
At Billy's first onslaught, the tramp fell prone upon the ground and the stocking slipped out of his hand into a pool of shallow water. In vain the frantic fellow tried to rise to his feet. Button scratched him, Stubby nipped his legs and clung to his clothing, and Billy kept bunting him this way and that.

Strange as it may seem, none of those engaged in the struggle noticed the water rushing down upon them from beneath the old mill, and before they knew what had happened, they were engulfed in the foaming flood. Down into the shallow brook-bed they were carried, attacked and attackers, all sputtering and struggling except Billy Whiskers. He had seized the stocking and clung grimly to it as he swam toward the bank.

Fortunately for Billy and his companions, the crest of the flood

lasted only a minute or two, for the pond was a small one and there was not much pressure behind the torrent. As the waters subsided, the dripping animals climbed out upon the bank, leaving the tramp to be quickly surrounded by a group of men whom Uncle Dan had called together.

The three Chums were soon the



center of a crowd of children who shrieked their approval when Billy walked solemnly up to Tiny Tim and laid the heavy stocking at his feet.

"It's heavy! It's full of money!" Tiny Tim cried. "Oh, Uncle

Dan, come here quick! I think Billy has found Aunt Mercy's stocking!"

"Three cheers for Billy Whiskers!" shouted somebody. Others took up the cry and the place resounded with cheers while the throng pressed eagerly forward to obtain a glimpse of the goat who had at last redeemed himself in the eyes of the entire village.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CHUMS LEAVE PUDDLE CORNERS

FOR a whole week the Chums were petted and praised and spoiled by all the good people at Puddle Corners. Though the whole affair was clothed with mystery and nobody understood just how Billy had come to find the hidden loot, they regarded it as highly probable that the Chums had had something to do with its recovery and insisted upon treating the three pals like conquering heroes.

Of course the animals enjoyed all the adulation but they were becoming rather tired of such continual attention. They were growing fat and lazy, too. Even Stubby, who wasn't naturally a fat dog, became so roly-poly that he found it increasingly difficult to do the tricks that had once been so easy for him, but Button was more and more inclined to lie in one spot and yawned repeatedly upon arising.

Billy Whiskers, too, grew fatter than he had ever been in his life, for the good things came pouring in from every side and he simply could not resist eating them. He, too, felt more and more inclined to lie in the shade of the big lilac bush and take things as easy as possible, but his fear that Nannie might think him too old and fat

and podgy upon his return kept him more active than he otherwise would have been.

"I'm not going to have Nannie say that I'm old and poky," he fretted. "I do feel lazy, I'll admit, but not old. No, indeed. I never felt younger in my life, never!"

"Old, fiddlesticks! There isn't a young goat in the world who can keep up with you, Billy," agreed Button tactfully.

"Nor one half as handsome," declared Stubby loyally. "Or as famous," he added, for the rescue of Aunt Mercy's money had once more placed Billy's name in headlines of all the leading papers, and he was verily the talk of the town.

Then one day, to Tiny Tim's dismay and sorrow, the Watsons drove into the yard with a trailer hitched on behind their big car.

"Had to buy it to take the big rascal home again," laughed Mr. Watson. "That old goat has certainly cost me a lot of money down through the years, but it has been good advertising for my farm and my goats, so I guess it's been worth it. Well, if there aren't Button and Stubby! The rascals! I knew they would be here, though for the life of me I couldn't see how they could find the place."

Upon the urgent invitation of Uncle Dan and Aunt Hetty the Watsons decided to remain in Puddle Corners for a day or two, and Tiny Tim was overjoyed and hastened to tell Barbara and Teddy the good news.

"Let's give a party just before they leave," Barbara suggested eagerly. "We can invite everybody to come and say good-bye."

"And bring presents," suggested Teddy.

"That's just the thing!" agreed Tiny Tim, approving heartily. "Perhaps we can show them just how much we love all of them."

So it happened that on the morning of the leave-taking, all the children as well as many of the grown-ups in Puddle Corners were present to bid good-bye to the three adventurers.

"I didn't expect anything like this," declared Billy ruefully. "Why, I can't eat half of the things that are waiting to be eaten, and some of the children are going to be bitterly disappointed. They expect me to eat, just because I'm a goat. But I can't; I declare I can't! I'm not hungry. I've been stuffing for a week. What *shall* I do?"

"Save things and eat them on the trip," suggested Stubby. "I'd like to do that myself. I can't eat half of this meat."

"So would I," sighed Button. "Let's put everything in that big box over there. You can drag it to the trailer and Tiny Tim will surely understand and put it on top before we leave."

"Good idea!" Billy declared, greatly relieved. "We can try it, anyway. Perhaps they will understand and not be offended." With that he walked sedately over to the big box and placed a bag of candy inside. Button followed with a piece of liver and Stubby gravely deposited a big bone.

"They can't eat it. They want to save it!" Tiny Tim cried laughing. "Aren't they smart?"

After that all the edibles were placed in the box, greatly to the relief of the three animals, but there were other presents which they

were obliged to wear. Stubby and Button were bedecked with ribbons, and Billy was given a handsome new collar with *Billy Whiskers* engraved on the solid gold plate. Even Tommy Haines and Ricky Phillips came sheepishly forward with their present, a dozen huge

cornballs strung together on a string which they placed around Billy's neck.

"That ought to repay Billy for being shut in the bear pen," laughed Uncle Dan. "If there is anything that Billy likes better than cornballs, it is more of the same thing."

"He likes doughnuts, too," declared Aunt Hetty, and placed a box of luscious sugared ones on the trailer. "Billy likes doughnuts better than anything else, don't you, Billy?"

"I certainly do," agreed Billy, and nodded gravely, to everybody's huge delight.

And then, to cap the climax, Tiny Tim played a march upon his harmonica and the three tired animals did their famous dance upon Uncle Dan's veranda. In the midst of it who should drive into the yard but the MacGregors.

For a moment pandemonium reigned as the dance ended amid thunderous applause and the excited animals leaped down to greet their old friends of that happy trip to the Yellowstone. Stubby barked until he was hoarse and capered madly around the three children. Button purred as loudly as he was able and leaped upon Margie's shoulder where he rubbed his cold nose beneath her ear and made her shriek with laughter. Billy, wise old diplomat, did his best to divide his favors equally, for he knew that they all loved him.

But there must be an end to all good things, sad to say, and at last

the Watsons climbed into their car and the parting had to come. Tiny Tim felt so bad to see his beloved pal depart that he could say nothing at all because of the enormous lump in his throat, but he put his arms around Billy's neck and hugged him with all his might. Some of the others, however, could not restrain their tears as they patted their famous friend for the last time. Joan screamed lustily, and even Gene wiped away a tear after he had murmured huskily, "Good-bye, Billy! Come and visit *us* next time!"

The big car pulled slowly out of the yard and the trailer rumbled along behind, bearing the three excited Chums, who waved and waved to the crowd there on the lawn until the car rounded a bend in the road.

"That's what always spoils my vacations," Billy Whiskers mourned, disconsolately.

"What do you mean?" demanded Stubby, sniffing at one of the bones on the floor of the trailer.

"This having to leave people you have grown to love," explained Billy sadly. "Dear me, I don't think I shall ever leave home again. It always makes me so blue when the fun is over."

"Cheer up, you'll soon be with Nannie," soothed Stubby, gnawing away at a most delicious beef bone.

"And you're too old to roam anyway," laughed Button slyly.

"Old! The very idea! Why, I'm as young and frisky as I ever was

in my life," Billy insisted, indignantly. "Just wait until I get home. Nannie will tell me that I'm as fit as a fiddle, see if she doesn't, and she should know if anyone does. It won't be long until I see her dear face again!"

And it wasn't. Just a week later Mr. Watson drove into his own dooryard and Nannie came bounding to meet them.

"Here we are, Nannie dear!" Billy Whiskers cried, jumping to the ground with Aunt Hetty's box of sugared doughnuts in his mouth. He had saved every one of them for Nannie! "And here's a box of the best doughnuts you ever ate, right from Puddle Corners, New Hampshire! How's my dear little cream puff, anyway?"

"Very well indeed," Nannie replied quickly. "And my, how proud I am of my Billy Whiskers! The papers have been full of your doings, my dear, and everybody is talking about you. And I declare if you don't look younger than ever, Billy! What *have* you been doing?"

"There! What did I tell you?" laughed Billy Whiskers, nodding with satisfaction as he turned to his two Chums. "Nannie is always right, too. That's the best part of it. Come on, my dear. Let's go somewhere and eat these doughnuts while we talk things over."

"Let's!" replied Nannie, and stayed close to Billy's side as the two walked slowly down the lane on their way to the grove on the distant hill.

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